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U.S. foreign assistance policies in Africa: from unipolarism to competition

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ABSTRACT

The research project analyses the recent U.S. foreign assistance policy in Africa, considering China's growing presence on the continent. The strategic importance of development aid, used as a tool for foreign policy objectives, and the doctrine inspired by “modernization theory” in promoting US assistance in Africa, will be assessed. The main research question will focus on the most recent US initiatives, namely the \$55 billion plan and investment strategy in the sub-Saharan area announced at the 2022 US-Africa Summit, and the intent will be to investigate whether these initiatives can be considered as responses to China's increasing involvement in Africa. The study, therefore, will take into account the objectives and results of US policies, sectoral investments, and their geopolitical/economic implications, and it will also be supported by an analysis of the Chinese expansion in Africa in order to have an overview on the implications for US strategies on the continent.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign aid generally is a practice that allows the transfer of resources to support a less developed country. Official Development Assistance is officially the term used by members of the Development Assistance Committee to describe what most people would call aid.

According to the ODA, foreign assistance is classified as activities carried out with the main objective of the economic development and well-being of developing countries, and it is a measure of donor effort.

However, when considering foreign aid, it is important to know each connotation related to this practice.

It is commonly recognised that foreign assistance is a strategy by many states in terms of several advantages. Since the years of the Cold War, the allocation of aid was a common process in states relations at the global level. This aspect has often been highlighted by the way benefactor states have used it in their foreign policies. So, the following research thesis focuses on development aid as a foreign policy instrument of a donor country. The subject of the thesis concerns the political and economic role of foreign assistance, with particular attention to recent US strategies in Africa.

A continent that, thanks to its significant demographic growth, and its unexpressed potential, plays a key role in the international context. This area is the object of interest of many countries that seek to establish their own sphere of influence. China is certainly one of these countries, which in recent years, has significantly expanded its political, economic, and sociocultural dominance on the continent.

At the same time, the importance and relevance towards the continent has seen a decline by the USA in recent decades. Initiatives such as the Bush administration's PEPFAR and Obama's health efforts have been recognized as very important achievements. However, this has not prevented a general decline in trade flows and especially in US assistance to the continent.

The lack of interest of previous administrations has manifested prominently in US foreign policies, giving much more room for rivals such as China to expand into Africa.

In this perspective, the transformation in US foreign assistance policies with respect to geopolitical changes and Chinese action in Africa becomes a reason for great interest in this final paper.

It is precisely this consideration that leads us to analyse how the new strategies in Africa have been set up by the Biden administration. It is therefore necessary to know its developments to have a much more delineated research framework.

The context of competition between great powers on the African continent is part of a long period of political motivations and strategies, but above all it is manifested in the transition from a unipolar order after the fall of the Soviet Union to an increasingly multipolar international arena. The so-called Liberal International Order (LIO) has led countries to increase their growth potential. As a result, many emerging countries and regions such as China and East Africa have strengthened their role globally, but at the same time they have begun to look more to their own interests at the expense of other global players such as the United States. This clearly

has an impact on the domestic and foreign policies of the United States, which should reshape its priorities, relating to new actors and new challenges, especially on the African continent.

Considering these premises, the research thesis aims to analyse how China's arrival has changed US policies and above all, whether these assistance policies can be considered concrete responses to China's growing role in Africa. Understanding whether geostrategic competition and rivalry with China have had a real impact on US strategy is certainly an important issue in the international context.

The thesis discusses this issue, following a path of four chapters that will delve into the various aspects of US foreign assistance to Africa and the factors that influenced it.

More specifically, in chapter one, the allocation of aid as a fundamental tool in the foreign policy will be discussed, understanding the importance of these initiatives for the United States. This policy element will be accompanied by an in-depth description of the legislative evolution of US foreign assistance and an analysis of the theory of modernization in correlation with US assistance policy. It will therefore be interesting to discover how the concept of modernization and development have changed in American thought up to the present day.

In the second chapter, we will then come to address in detail, the recent US aid programs in Africa, citing and deepening the 50 billion Plan for Africa for the next three years and the Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa. The objectives and American principles in providing aid on the continent will be analysed up to the results and a general evaluation of current policies.

As for the third chapter, we will proceed to expose the Chinese arrival on the African continent, trying to understand how the Asian government manages to exert such a considerable influence in Africa. The analysis will allow us to understand the interests and motivations of the growing Chinese involvement, but above all it will serve as a forerunner to discuss the next and final chapter.

In the final chapter, in fact, the research questions mentioned above will be analysed in a more direct and in-depth way. The aim will be to understand how the context of rivalry and geostrategic competition between the US and China in Africa has affected US assistance policies, answering whether American foreign assistance strategies are direct responses to China.

In conducting the research, both primary sources such as government factsheets, congressional reports, and official documents have been used, as well as secondary sources such as journal articles, reports, and academic papers that highlighted the observations and considerations of academics in studying the reported phenomena.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN AID IN THE US POLITICS: FOREIGN POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Strategic role of aid in foreign policy: assistance as a policy instrument.

It is a recognised fact that foreign assistance is an instrument of foreign policy. In many cases the ability of states to use strategic tools is mentioned through elements like diplomatic capacity, commercial flows, military power, and the allocation of foreign aid.

In this political framework, development aid can be considered as a means of serving the interests of governments and political leaders. Through aid, it is possible to influence internal and foreign affairs of other states. In fact, academics like Tarnoff and Lawson argue that U.S. leaders and policymakers view foreign assistance as an instrument to manage US foreign policy, interrelated with US national security interests (Apodaca, 2017).

In foreign policy, aid is often used to lobby and influence, as a reward for certain behaviors or as an incentive to change actions. Moreover, development aid can be a tool with a certain degree of flexibility. As cited by many U.S. foreign policy specialists: "it can act as a means of influencing events, solving specific problems, and projecting U.S. values." And decisions about how, where, and when to allocate foreign aid are based on national interests and objectives supported by the donor state government (Ibid, 2017, pag. 2).

Foreign aid, if used effectively as a political tool, can assume different forms depending on the objectives to be achieved. The type of aid is important because it depends on the geopolitical needs to satisfy. Morgenthau, for example, classified foreign aid according to the foreign policy purpose, dividing it into humanitarian, subsistence, prestige, military, corruption and aid for economic development. Depending on the objectives set, different tools can be used (Koku, Otieno, & Kisiang'ani, 2022).

Development assistance is a practice with a significant value, as it implies an important political potential for donor countries. In this sense, it can be said that strengthening political involvement can be spotted behind the logic of aid. This logic has been a constant and dominant theme in the justifications for development assistance. The Marshall Plan, for example, was described as a strategic tool, used to avoid external aggression by the Soviet Union and to pursue political interests of western countries.

The Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s and the Carlucci Report, commissioned by the Reagan administration, reaffirmed the fact that U.S. foreign security and economic cooperation programs were interconnected and integral to U.S. foreign policy. Subsequently, the creation of an Agency for Mutual Development and Security was instrumental in increasing a single path between economic and security assistance programs, managing to administer them according to the same US policy objectives (Commission on Security and Economic Assistance, 1983).

During the Cold War, containing the Soviet Union was often one of the motivations that prompted donor countries to commit to providing aid. In the period of decolonization and the Soviet danger, the commitment of countries, especially the United States, registered an increase under the scope of reducing the possible discontent created by poverty and communist temptations. In this context, it was more important to preserve geostrategic interests than the aid plan itself (Ariel, 2011).

This has changed considerably in the post-Cold War period. Geopolitical events have lowered the strategic and competitive value of aid, and they increased its credibility in terms of economic efficiency. In development aid programmes, the promotion of democracy has replaced the strategic competition of the Cold War. In some cases, countries received aid as an incentive to implement democratic policy reforms, in others it was not provided as punishment for resisting such changes (Williams, 2024).

From the 1990s, international financial institutions started to increase their involvement in development affairs, and to implement aid with conditions related to market liberalization and open trade. Consequently, it started a discussion on the possibility for financial institutions to foster capitalism through the allocation of aid (Ibid, 2024).

Finally, it is relevant to note that very often it has been recognized the impact of geopolitical changes and historical periods in influencing foreign assistance, which can be used as a real tool within the foreign policy sphere of donor countries (Apodaca, 2017).

Generally, the debate on the role of aid has always been very heated. Foreign assistance itself is considered not only in economic terms but also in political and geostrategic perspectives. Gaining some support or gaining an advantage are factors to consider when talking about development aid. However, there are many doubts over the use of aid to achieve geostrategic objectives.

One of the problems, according to analysts, arises in relation to national security, i.e. when a country provides another country with its own resources, this act can be seen as a sort of momentary weakening as the donor country puts itself in a situation of concession, hoping to achieve a greater advantage in the future.

This exposure of the donor country is risky in the context of aid fungibility. In many situations, aid can be used for other outbreaks than initially planned. And it is precisely this diversion of aid that could create even greater problems for the donor state (Milner & Tingley, 2013).

The issue of fungibility is considered a side effect of the aid by analysts. The example of a donor government that provides help for the construction of a school, but the funds are used for other purposes like military equipment underlines concretely this issue (Koch, 2024).

Another aspect is that of the so-called Samaritan dilemma, according to which foreign assistance could have unintended consequences such as increasing the dependence of some beneficiary governments that in the meantime do not progress as they should. This problem is also defined by scholars under the name of "moral hazard", and it is an impactful issue in terms of achieving the goals for the donor state (Milner & Tingley, 2013).

Moral hazard is presented as a significant problem in the field of aid. It is characterized by its posthumous influence on the behaviour of the recipient of aid with respect to adverse selection. In other words, it is explained also by a change in behavioural actions of the recipient governments after the allocation of aid.

Going more concretely, debt cancellation programs are considered as an example of this dynamic as the "beneficiary" governments can count on debt cancellation, and consequently, they can be more susceptible to take risks by borrowing even more (Koch, 2024).

Making sure that aid flows and achieves the intended political goals then becomes a clear concern of the donor. In this case, it is frequently assumed that conditions should be imposed on the receiving countries to deal with the lack of control after the allocation of aid. This, for example, could translate into requiring certain behaviors for aid to be made available.

Although this may mean in some cases alienating recipients or pushing recipients to collaborate with other competitors, as pointed out by Schelling (1955, Chapter 2, Volume I), on the other hand, without conditions, donors cannot be sure that aid will achieve the pre-established objectives.

In addition, the flexibility of aid should not be underestimated in terms of political and non-political objectives. Schelling highlights the fact that foreign assistance can promote various objectives for both recipient and donor countries. This could lead to a situation in which one opts for a type of foreign aid aimed at influencing the policies of the recipient country. However, if the recipient manages the aid according to its own interests, the donor countries' ability to influence is considerably diminished.

At the same time, the fact that today one donor is easily replaced by another does not help the recipient countries in their political pursuit. According to Crumm (1995, Chapter 4, Volume I) the political potential of aid loses some of its advantages when there are many alternatives for development support. In today's context, this is even more valuable as the number of countries is increasing sharply. Just think of China or Brazil, which provide a valid aid alternative to Western ones, reducing the ability of many more traditional aid systems to influence (Milner & Tingley, 2013).

In this context, fungibility, new actors and the inability to impose conditions are elements that influence the dynamics of foreign aid as a political tool. As a result, donor countries seem to be increasingly active in the direct management of aid allocated. According to Baldwin, in some situations, there is a direct intervention of the donor in assistance policies.

The relationship between the foreign policy of a donor and the domestic policy of the recipient countries is also highlighted by many analysts. Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2007, Chapter 11, Volume I; 2009, Chapter 12, Volume I) consider the domestic policy of a receiving country to be fundamental in the dynamics of aid. In other words, in some situations, in order to remain in charge of a state and control public dissent, the political

leaders of the most underdeveloped countries maintain foreign assistance relations with the recipient countries, and in return they give political concessions to the recipient countries.

Nevertheless, this dynamic policy of granting aid is likely to become increasingly complicated as it requires significant compromises. These processes determine the modalities and use of aid in a meaningful way. Precisely for this reason, foreign assistance in some cases seems to lose its economic potential in favour of political one (Ibid, 2013).

1.2 The debate around "Foreign aid" definitions and US considerations on foreign assistance

When it comes to support for underdeveloped countries by Western and non-Western countries, the term generally used is foreign aid. Nevertheless, the definitions and considerations that exist when it comes to analysing development aid should not be underestimated.

The problem could arise when the term in question is used to indicate a specific aspect such as financial support for example, but this term could also indicate other aspects associated with it.

Consulting the definitions proposed by major dictionaries such as Britannica and Oxford: foreign assistance is defined as "the international transfer of capital, goods or services by a country or an international organization for the benefit of the recipient country or its population". The nature of the aid is to be considered economic, military or emergency humanitarian (Williams, 2024).

Many analysts define foreign aid as the transfer of real resources by governments or public institutions from richer countries to the governments of less developed countries. The elements that emerge are mainly related to the economic aspect. Foreign aid flows can be divided into official and private flows but also into models managed by multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, the IMF and finally, bilateral models consisting of capital provided by the donor government to the government of the beneficiary countries (Williams, 2024).

In addition to the more traditional forms of aid, the foreign assistance sector has evolved considerably in the recent period. As evidence of this, beyond the traditional actors mentioned above, the private sector, NGOs and philanthropists have also entered this area and in many cases, they furnish funding when traditional actors cannot be effective.

New modalities and actors influence the changing perspectives of foreign aid, also raising questions about traditional modes of aid at both bilateral and multilateral levels. The private sector together with new financing instruments could play an important role in the future of this process, providing viable alternatives to those already in place.

However, this change of course in aid does not particularly affect the importance and role that foreign assistance has in supporting countries (Runde, 2020).

The U.S. approach also follows the same vision. In fact, the "Foreign Assistance Act of 1961", defines foreign aid

“as any tangible or intangible item provided by the United States Government [including “by means of gift, loan, sale, credit, or guaranty”] to a foreign country or international organization under this or any other Act, including but not limited to any training, service, or technical advice, any item of real, personal, or mixed property, any agricultural commodity, United States dollars, and any currencies of any foreign country which are owned by the United States Government.... (§634(b)“(Congressional Research Service, 2022, pag.2).

In general, the *Foreign Assistance Act* of the United States aims to promote economic, social or political development and improve the living conditions of the population, but it also deals with important issues such as humanitarian emergencies and the achievement of national security objectives, aspects not always mentioned when considering foreign assistance (U.S. House of Representatives & U.S. Senate, 2003). In this perspective, many analysts include many forms in their interpretation of development aid like economic foreign assistance, but at the same time, also possible forms of military assistance, mentioning the supply of military hardware at subsidized rates, the provision of military technical support and military presence in support of a country involved in conflict (Koku, Otieno, & Kisiang’ani, 2022).

The vision of the OECD, the organization for the economic development of countries, is articulated in the opposite way. Official Development Assistance is officially the term used by members of the Development Assistance Committee to describe what most people would call aid. According to the ODA, foreign assistance is classified as activities carried out with the main objective of the economic development and well-being of developing countries, and it is a measure of donor effort, which includes grants and grant equivalents of subsidized loans (OECD, 2024).

The ODA interpretation is different compared to the definition provided by the FAA, as military support and the promotion of the strategic interests of donor countries are excluded from the official definition (Congressional Research Service, 2022). In line with this, development aid is often identified as a set of different forms of economic assistance provided by one nation to another through donations. Morgenthau defined foreign assistance as the transfer of financing, goods and services from one country to another but also as a tool to guarantee education, health, technology and the development of public infrastructure.

In the same way, development aid is seen as a way to increase business investment and effectively combat poverty and underdevelopment, as well as improve the standard of living of recipient countries.

Furthermore, this definition with reference to economic growth is also further explored by the scholar Ahrjo, who identifies foreign direct investment in development aid as a potential vehicle for the transfer of knowledge, technology, increased productivity and entrepreneurship (Morgenthau, 1962).

The specific distinction between the FAA and the ODA, especially in the context of the objectives and support, provided through foreign assistance, plays an important role in the concept of "foreign aid". This concept can imply various conditions, often aligned with the specific interests of the actors involved. Therefore, it is essential not to confuse the terms used with respect to a phenomenon, being aware of the different interpretations allows us to clarify and understand what each actor attributes to this specific process (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

The *State Appropriations, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Act for Fiscal Year 2024* is a regulatory act that reaffirms the concept of foreign assistance according to U.S. policy. Based on the official document, \$61.608 billion of funds were made available for the U.S. Department of State, USAID, and other related programs. This bill is issued annually, following the objectives and strategies of the US government. For the 2024 fiscal year, national security, the international leadership of the United States and the maintenance of commitments to partners and allies are all possible goals mentioned in the fact sheet. As a matter of fact, Senator Chris Coons, chairman of the Senate State Appropriations Subcommittee, defines this act as “new resources needed for humanitarian support, for global health security and to stop the flow of fentanyl to protect communities”. All this reaffirms the consideration of US administrations in dealing with development not only by focusing on the economic aspect, but also by including elements not mentioned by other actors involved in foreign assistance like ODA (U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, 2023).

1.3 US legislative evolution in foreign aid policy

In 1948, the first US legislative development began with the promulgation by the United States Congress of the first *Foreign Assistance Act* that formalized the Marshall Plan and the creation of the Agency for Economic Cooperation (ECA). This produced a period of evolution in US legislation that led to the drafting of the *Mutual Security Act* in 1951 and the consequent abolition of the ECA.

In 1954, the *Mutual Security Act* was established with the aim of amending and reworking US foreign assistance policies and laws. At the same time, in 1955, the Agency for International Cooperation (ICA) was founded in place of the Administration of Foreign Operations. The ICA was initially under the control of the State Department, demonstrating some weakness.

In 1959, the Draper Committee published a report called "Economic Assistance Programs and Activities," with the intent of proposing the creation of a unified economic/technical assistance agency outside the State Department. New elements to be included in foreign assistance were therefore highlighted, including: greater organization in the long term; increase in decentralization on the territory; and foreign policy oversight and alignment of military, economic, and agricultural initiatives under the leadership of the State Department (USAID, 2002).

In 1961, the first piece of legislation regarding US foreign assistance was established. The document defined and regulated the government practices within foreign aid. All of this was promoted by the Kennedy administration, which was intended to effectively reformulate assistance practices. Its purpose was achieved by the enactment of the *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961, which formulated the objectives and structures of US assistance.

At the same time, along with the establishment of the FAA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was created with the aim of ensuring the proper organization of foreign assistance to developing countries.

Basically, the objectives of US foreign assistance were formulated in three main areas: development assistance, economic support, and food aid.

The *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961 aimed to alleviate poverty in the underdeveloped part of the world; promoting self-sustaining economic growth; encouraging individual civil and economic rights; integrating developing countries into the international economic system; and finally, promoting good governance through the fight against corruption and improving transparency and accountability.

With the introduction of this piece of legislation, the previous legal body has been replaced by a set of more specific and defined regulations in order to manage external relations with developing countries.

Moreover, several changes were made to the FAA along with the addition of new autonomous laws such as the *Peace Corps*.¹

In general, the FAA is divided into five parts that cover non-military and military development directives, funding allocations, limitations on assistance under the law itself, creation and authorization of various government agencies and departments, and administrative and technical aspects of its administration.

Subsequently, in 1969, there was a major amendment to the *Foreign Assistance Act* which presented new objectives and strategies to be pursued. Promoting the foreign policy, security and general well-being of the United States, helping the peoples of the world to achieve economic development within a framework of democratic economic, social and political institutions were the main additions to the new act launched.

Therefore, the latter also defined the appropriations available under the FAA for fiscal years 1970 and 1971 in areas such as the Development Loan Fund, Technical Cooperation, Development Grants, American Schools and Hospitals Abroad, Population Growth Programs, Military Assistance, International Organizations and Programs, and Other Assistance and Funds.

Among other things, the act also provided for the introduction of a subsection authorizing the use of funds to carry out peaceful communications programs with the use of television and related technologies for educational, health, agricultural and community development purposes in less developed countries; and the creation of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation to mobilize and facilitate the transmission of private capital and expertise in economic and social progress.

Finally, the establishment of the American Institute for Social Development became an integral part of the new legislation. It provided for the supporting development activities aimed at creating conditions that offer all individuals the opportunity to improve their standard of living. However, it also included in the planned objectives: expanding educational opportunities at all levels, food production, agricultural development and

¹ In 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps by executive order, with congressional approval following that year. The Peace Corps aims to promote peace by providing operators trained to combat problems such as poverty and disease, and by fostering close ties between American volunteers and local communities.

National Archives. (n.d.). *Peace Corps*. Retrieved June 17, 2024, from

<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/peace-corps#:~:text=The%20concept%20of%20volunteers%20serving,through%20legislation%20later%20that%20year.>

improving environmental conditions regarding health, care, housing and other needs (U.S. House of Representatives, & U.S. Senate, 2003).

Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with US foreign assistance policies grew much around the 1970s. Within the Congress, it was thought that US assistance was failing to effectively meet the needs of the poorest countries. In 1973, lawmakers in the House and Senate proposed new bills to better address the needs of foreign policy and developing countries, becoming known as the *New Directions legislation*. The new legislative amendment provided for foreign assistance focused more on sectoral activities such as agriculture, population, education, the environment and energy. This *New Directions legislation* became a central part of the foreign assistance legislation, changing along with the amendments to the *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961.

However, there will be several changes in the interpretation of the legislation. Subsequently, the Reagan administration will bring a renewed role of the private sector and aid conditionalities into legislation, moving away from the previous vision of sectoral aid that was so promoted by *New Directions*.

This shift has been increasingly marked since 1987 as annual authorisations of funds have no longer been established to promote the sectoral approach to legislation. In fact, from the 1990s onwards, US legislation has detached itself from activities dedicated to strengthening sectoral aid to give more space to broader and more flexible accounts for development.

In the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, there were several attempts to change the legislation on foreign assistance. Several bills aimed at reforming American policies, but with different characteristics and not always the hoped success. Initiatives such as the Peterson and Carlucci commissions have supported major changes but have not been impactful enough in bringing these changes into legislation in a well-defined way. As well as the bills formulated by the Hamilton-Gilman Task Force and the Wharton Report.

The major initiatives and effective efforts that still have an important basis for American foreign assistance today have been as mentioned above *The Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961 and the *New Directions legislation* of 1973 which really proposed a reformulation of existing aid laws (Nowels, 2007).

According to US Congress, another important aspect that emerged from the 1990s onwards, was the authorisation of foreign aid programs in the form of appropriations for foreign operations (currently within the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs [SFOPS] appropriations measure) and in terms of international food aid of the agriculture appropriations measure (Congressional research service, 2022).

In the U.S. foreign assistance system, the *State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act* (SFOPS) plays an important role in establishing annual funding for the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other agencies and programs related to foreign policy and international assistance (Congressional research service, 2024).

The problem arises, however, when many initiatives were carried out under the SFOPS bill, but in many cases, they could be included in diplomatic programs linked to the State Department not always framed as foreign assistance. According to Congress, in the 1990s, it became increasingly clear that many foreign operations could not be disclosed under the SFOPS Act or as international appropriations for food aid. A significant number of U.S. agencies and development departments promoted foreign assistance plans that followed their

own conditions and were not directly authorized by traditional committees, as was the case with activities promoted under SFOPS. The Nunn-Lugar Department of Defense (DOD), for example, has conducted assistance activities with the aim of eliminating nuclear and other weapons. The Department of Energy has done the same and has promoted initiatives aimed at monitoring nuclear activities. In addition, following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States and the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defense promoted aid plans with the aim of providing military support to foreign forces along with the help of financial aid. These aid plans in many cases have exceeded even those that were adopted under the law of the appropriation measure for foreign operations.

For this reason, the executive and Congress are trying to better define the aid framework according to the parameters of the FIOPS allocation measure. In this context, the study of the data and a major reorganization certainly is needed in the discussions between the executive power and the US Congress (Congressional research service, 2022).

In general, the transformation and changes that have taken place in foreign aid legislation have been characterised by important motivations and situations. One of these has been dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the US foreign assistance system. The implementation of the legislation on the New Directorates and the Carlucci Commission took place as a result of this dissatisfaction, trying to rebuild the structure and the objective of the American foreign assistance policy, which still lacked effectiveness in achieving the expected results.

Public or congressional support also played a key role in influencing American legislation. Foreign assistance lacked a constituency that could influence even the public view towards the provision of aid to the most underdeveloped countries. In fact, one of the most recurrent problems manifested itself in the public perception that foreign aid was a way of taking resources from national programs and distributing them elsewhere.

This was confirmed in the *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961, and by the Carlucci Commission, which expressed some doubt about the problem of getting everyone to agree, of having common support that would allow for the creation of more solid legislation.

Finally, it is also crucial to note one of the most significant aspects, namely the geopolitical changes that required a renewal of norms and policies. Precisely according to this logic, with the end of the Cold War, the legislative pillars of foreign assistance had to be modified as they were still linked to the rhetoric of the East-West confrontation (Nowels, 2007).

1.4 Economic ideology of foreign aid: “Modernization theory” and the concept of “Development”

As explained above, foreign aid has a certain value in the management of a country's foreign policy. However, it is also characterised by the economic value it can assume. It is no coincidence that foreign assistance has historically been linked to concepts of economic policy, especially in the United States, where the theme of development and modernization began to be strong in the 1960s.

Since the 1950s, a significant debate on African development started, fuelled by the launch of the Marshall Plan, which posed some questions on the topic. There was confidence in the idea that development could counter several problems like low savings, poor trade and lack of investment. Nevertheless, there were two conflicting positions: on the one hand, many scholars argued that assistance was essential to promote growth and modernization in the countries of the African continent, on the other hand others believed that such aid could not promote progress but rather there was a risk of hindering it (Koku, Otieno, & Kisiang'ani, 2022). The rapid technological and economic development of European societies in the nineteenth century enhanced the idea that modernity and the reform of the cultural attributes of western societies could be the secret to economic growth and development.

The concept of development and economic growth relied on the idea of modernity, putting European societies at the top with their cultural and social development, while relegating other societies and cultures to bottom positions. As a matter of fact, the most underdeveloped countries were described with negative terms as "savages," "barbarians," and "primitives" to underline their inferiority on the global arena. This interpretation put western countries on the top and criticised the non-Western societies, such as Africa, for their social and cultural features, considered as impediments to that economic development (Ukwandu, 2017).

Supporting this vision, Rostow, in his manifesto, argued that the transition from tradition to modernity was to be considered as an obligation for African governments. Less developed countries were increasingly attracted by two different models of development, especially in the period of decolonization, which provided a new economic path for the countries that had been colonized (Cooper, 2004). Nevertheless, there was a strong belief in the need to move from a traditional system to a more modern one to cope with poverty and underdevelopment issues. A path that, on the contrary, Western countries had undertaken. As a matter of fact, Rostow in his works was convinced that the only possibility for African countries to reach development was passing through the five stages of economic growth defined in his theory. This position on development was also shared by academics such as W. Arthur Lewis and David C. McClelland, who highlighted the relevance of cultural values and attributes as possible obstacles to development in the African case. In addition, the theory of modernization was based on the belief that by introducing modern methods in technology and science, focusing on trade and exports, and focusing on industrialization, developing countries could experience rapid economic growth like other modern countries.

Policies, introducing capital, investment and savings were considered fundamental to ensure the so-called catch-up with Western industrialized countries and the absence of one of these elements was seen as the cause of underdevelopment. Differently, in this context, foreign aid was a tool to compensate for one of these shortcomings, trying to fight poverty and underdevelopment.

According to Arthur Lewis and Rostow, a strong absence of investment in the economy and infrastructure development has played a very negative role in contributing to underdevelopment. In addition, this negative dynamic was also characterized by excessive spending and a shortage of foreign currency in several states. Consequently, foreign assistance represented the most feasible way to curb these problems and revitalize underdeveloped countries.

Finally, the discussion also covered the possibility of using aid to address a technological deficiency in the countries concerned. According to the poverty trap model, there are factors such as low productivity, inefficiency and a high population rate that can significantly reduce the degree of development of a country, affecting its ability to accumulate capital necessary for the modernization process. For this reason, development aid was perceived as technical assistance but also as a temporary flow of capital, necessary to avoid the so-called poverty trap (Koku, Otieno et al, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is also worth underlining the opposite visions on the development matter.

Despite the great support for the link between development and development aid, critics directed to modernization models were not lacking. Many academics argued that aid could also produce negative effects on the recipient countries. Griffin and Enos, thanks to a study based on a series of data, have highlighted the possibility of a negative correlation between growth in development aid and economic growth. This thesis was also strongly supported by the scholar Kanbur who introduced the fact that the equation of aid and development did not always work and the cause of this could be seen by the low quality of the institutions in the recipient countries. By this, it meant that corruption, weak institutions, and the influence of donor countries made a country's development project difficult. In addition, problems such as poverty and hunger could not be explained by the lack of capital but above all could negatively affect the economy of a country even though the latter had received aid allocations (Matunhu, 2011).

It is precisely the question of poverty that has often sparked the debate within the discussion over the modernization theory. One of the most common criticisms is the lack of consideration for the poorer classes and initiatives aimed at reducing poverty. The risk, according to the supporters of this paradigm, is to reduce involvement, community participation and support for possible change (Ibid, 2011, pag 66).

The approach to change is presented as a forced social transformation that takes on a value imposed on a society and citizens. According to this perspective, the Modernization process fails as human nature tends to resist change, due to the uncertainty that transformation brings (Tipps, 1973).

The African Development Partnership (NEPAD) program for this reason has not achieved the expected results, receiving criticisms by many African heads of state and government for its elitist character.

Generally, assistance plans can create difficulties when receiving states have to deal with conditionalities. The problem of conditions arises above all when these conditions tend to favour donor states more than African recipient states.

All this is linked to the consideration, according to which modernization has in many cases failed, leading to greater poverty and interfering with local citizens' lives.

This reveals the influence that donor states exert in underdeveloped regions, and this predominance of metropolitan countries in Africa started to raise important concerns in the past and contemporary debate on economic growth and aid.

Rodney reiterated the same concept, by arguing that the colonial conquest following the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 established a global economic and political dominance of the West over Africa. Africa's endogenous development path has been characterized as an "externally driven development path" controlled

and manipulated by the metropolis powers. This dynamic has affected the formation of the theory of dependency and has hindered the autonomous development of the continent, highlighting the complex relationships between aid, modernization and economic sovereignty (Matunhu, 2011).

As a matter of fact, the Theory of Dependency was developed when it recognised the fragility presented by the modernization promise. Theoretical paradigms such as modernization were considered misleading in explaining the relationship between the developed world and poor regions.

Modernization followed the false path of colonialism by presenting itself not only as a system of exploitation, but as a system of repatriating profits from Africa.

According to the dependency theory, this transfer of profits represented a system of repatriation of the surplus value created by African labor using African resources. Therefore, the development of the West could be considered as part of the dialectical processes that led to Africa's underdevelopment. In other words, European domination of Africa has hindered the continent's economic progress (Ntini, 2016).

The fundamental concept of the school of dependency is that the development of the “metropolises” has been possible thanks to the underdevelopment of their satellites for their own progress. For example, human capital continues to move from Africa to more developed countries. In witnessing this observation on dependency, the metropolis-satellite analysis made by Le Roux and Tedros proves to be important. In fact, it highlights that on the African continent there may be a risk that the development of the satellite country could lead to the creation of the new dominant groups in the region, capable of appropriating the surplus generated by the country.

For this reason, it became essential for the "metropolis" countries to control the development of the satellite to benefit from this growth as well. In fact, in many cases, the adoption and implementation of policies have been purposely ineffective in order to better manage these situations (Matunhu, 2011).

According to this logic, despite the numerous bilateral and multilateral development aid of developed countries, Africa still reports an elevated degree of regional underdevelopment. Charton himself points out that regional inequalities on the continent are not temporary features destined to disappear over time. On the contrary, inequalities between regions are much more likely to increase rather than decrease. Therefore, the developed world, with its direct and indirect advantages, will continue to grow at the expense of Africa, which will remain in a stagnant stage (Koku, Otieno, & Kisiang'ani, 2022).

The capitalist world system born in the fifteenth century relies on the capital accumulation logic. Thanks to the imbalance in trade and investment, the center has managed to subtract economic surpluses from the periphery. The mechanism of resource extraction is the main feature of capitalism. The classic colonial relationship between center and periphery, for example, focused on the trade of raw materials produced by the colonies in exchange for artifacts produced by the European colonial powers. In addition, Aid provided to underdeveloped countries has been used as a means of extracting value from profits generated by donor investments. Within this framework, economic profits could be returned to “the centers” but at the same time, the consequence was a significant decrease in terms of benefits for the periphery (Hout, 2016).

1.5 The debate on the Theory of Modernization and the concept of development in US politics

The concept of development with its implications has been widely discussed in US politics by several historians and academics, with a particular focus on the concept of development.

Around the 1950s, many scholars, including Scott, showed some confidence in the benefits of the modernization process, especially in the United States. This tendency has manifested itself in social theories as a kind of opportunity for traditional societies to transform themselves towards a condition of modernity similar to the United States. It was a particularly favourable period, as the interest of sociologists in this theory of development grew in parallel with political interest. During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, politicians began to seek legitimacy and orientation in social theories, collaborating with many modernization theorists in the management of foreign policy (Immerwahr, 2012).

The logic of modernization has highlighted the opportunity for the United States to guarantee development aid as a form of soft power, using technical assistance and educational institutions abroad to influence local policies. The use of military force was no longer the only applicable solution to achieve foreign policy objectives.

The theory suggested a long-term project that could potentially transform Africa, generating a collection of states as possible regional allies (Hazbun, 2016). In fact, President Harry S. Truman's Point Four foreign policy program, announced in his 1949 inaugural address, emphasized U.S. support and technical aid to promote global modernization in underdeveloped countries.

The initiative sought to codify a set of policies that had already been formulated since the Second World War and led to the creation of formal practices applicable in foreign aid.

Subsequently, these initiatives evolved to become an integrated part of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other supporting organizations (Ekbladh, 2013). In addition, it is worth noting that the idea of the United States as a promoter and strong supporter of modernizing transformations on a global scale was also manifested in Henry Luce's 1941 essay "The American Century". Luce argued that the US should spread its technical and economic potential throughout the world, and this was achievable when the USA was willing to send aid and technical support such as engineers, scientists, doctors, builders and educators. In the post-war period, US politicians set themselves the goal of establishing a liberal capitalist world order, led by the United States (Hazbun, 2016). The Marshall Plan promoted post-war economic recovery and, with NATO, established a security community to counter the threat posed by the USSR. Historian David Ekbladh observed that this version of modernization was applied to contain communist development and promote a new, more stable and liberal world order.

Beginning in the 1950s, this motivation became even more important in American foreign politics due to the decolonization process and the intensification of US-Soviet competition. The expansion of non-governmental group activity in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the increased involvement of the U.S. government in global modernization initiatives. As a matter of fact, the US started to issue assistance programs in agriculture,

infrastructure (the construction of large hydroelectric dams), education, defence, and aggressive population control (Ekbladh, 2013).

Around the 1960s, many US theorists held a positive outlook on the modernization and economic/political development of the most underdeveloped countries. Development was mainly intended to bring significant results in various fields such as industry, urban development, education and the evolution of communications. As previously reiterated, the supporters of modernization strongly believed in a transformation of traditional societies that would reach a political and economic structure close to that of the West.

Seymour Martin Lipset, an American sociologist, demonstrated this theory, emphasizing the connection between political development and different socioeconomic perspectives. In this case, the theory of modernization took on a sort of liberal-progressive matrix, and it implied this interconnection between the development and democratization of a country.

During the Kennedy administration, this element of union between development and political reform became increasingly important, especially in postcolonial regions.

Subsequently, the element of security also began to be included in the concept of US development, in a more impactful way than that of liberation. This happened in conjunction with the insurgency and violence of the decolonizations of many underdeveloped countries. At that time, the post-colonial areas were going through a situation of social and political instability. In fact, the Central Intelligence Agency's Office of National Estimates warned of the growing instability in the world (Garcia, 2022).

American concern was manifested in this unstable and uneven process of modernization that could be influenced or characterized by Soviet pressures. In fact, Rostow, as anticipated before, highlighted the threat of communism in interfering in the process of modernization, causing disruptive and negative consequences for the underdeveloped country.

This context has meant that in US politics there has been much more attention to counterinsurgency factors and activities in areas of recent independence.

Already towards the end of the 1960s, the usual concept linked to democracy and modernization gave more space to authoritarian and disruptive changes in American political thought. In other words, if before there was more focus on democracy and human rights, in that given period security and political stability took on a key role in foreign policy. In fact, it is no coincidence that sociologists and academics in favour of modernization have begun to include in the concept of development also the order and security of a country as the main drivers of change.

This theoretical development brought the idea that a strong leadership could guarantee the stability and order necessary for the development and modernization of a society and at the same time, limit the capacity for communist intervention.

In light of this idea, autocratic governments became more attractive because they were seen as better suited to allow the path of development from above and limit insurrections or opposition from below.

Although there was great debate about it, modernization took a position in favour of a framework of stability (Garcia, 2022).

At the same time, the economic historian Walt W. Rostow had an important impact on American politics, laying the theoretical foundations for economic development in the logic of modernization. In 1960, he published "The Stages of Economic Growth", outlining the steps necessary for economies to reach the take-off phase and develop economic systems in the image and likeness of the United States and Western countries. His model of development complemented the strategic objectives of American policy during the Cold War: in "A Non-Communist Manifesto" he emphasized the importance of modernization theory as a tool in the struggle of the Cold War, describing communism as a kind of threat that can affect a society in transition. This was also supported by many US theorists who put Western democracies, particularly the United States, at the top of the historical evolution, arguing that US historical experiences pointed the right path to modernity, and emphasizing how the United States could guide stagnant societies through the process of transition (Latham, 2000).

In the 1970s, the modern development paradigm was challenged in the management of foreign assistance policies. The term modernization and its school of thought have suddenly taken a negative connotation. Pragmatism, central planning and large-scale change were the main points criticized by the new neoliberal vision based on the free market paradigm. In this perspective, development aid continued, but without being the main objective in foreign policy decisions (Ekbladh, 2013).

It is also important to note that the crisis of the Bretton Woods economic system, the contestation of U.S. hegemony, the crisis of nation-state sovereignty, the financialization of the American economy and the loss of confidence in national authority have produced significant impact in increasing the loss of confidence toward values and principles of modernization.

Starting from this change, a certain ineffectiveness and violence of modernizing initiatives began to be detected, as argued by academics such as James C. Scott. The impetuosity associated with modernization objectives seemed to increase with the evidence of the failures of liberal modernization, leading politicians to resort to more coercive forms of development aid. A significant theoretical contribution to this issue is offered by Bradley Simpson's study "Economists with Guns" (2008) which analyzed the transformation of modernization theory into a "military modernization", identifying military dictatorships as a key agent of modernization, for their ability to overcome democratic resistance. Modernization projects became simultaneously more violent and less sensitive to local conditions. Several emerging perspectives, including elements such as human rights, participatory democracy, and peace, considered American modernization projects less and less feasible, underlying weaknesses in promoting economic prosperity (Immerwahr, 2012). The spread of modernization caused problems in many parts of the developing world, forcing the United States to neglect situations where abuses were committed by local leaders. In many episodes, the United States tolerated unstable regimes instead of promoting democracy, liberalism, and capitalism for socioeconomic growth and modernization. In the 1970s, American ideas of modernization were strongly opposed by neoliberal ideals. Development alternatives were explored and implemented, and the arguments of the neoliberals prevailed, replacing visions of modernization of a global New Deal with the market-centered promise of rapid

transformation. As the essential foundations of modernization deteriorated, Latham states that "the United States had a unique, global mission to transform the world in its own image."

However, within the U.S. government, the Nixon Doctrine was promulgated, whose "New Directions" policy on foreign aid indicated a major shift in USAID policies, reducing US commitment to development. In support of this, to reduce its political profile and financial commitments, the United States pushed international institutions, especially the World Bank, to play a leading role in development. Consequently, the World Bank emerged as the central institution of a renewed international development community (Ekbladh, 2013). In the 1980s and 1990s, "Washington Consensus" principles influenced the idea of development with the proposal of new neoliberal economic reforms.

The end of the Soviet Union represented an opportunity to exert US influence in the world. In fact, the fundamental principles of modernization related more to global security emerged. Consolidating itself as the dominant power globally, the United States began to connect liberal ideals with the global market and security. The crisis of modernization theory brought out new approaches and concepts. The new development models underlined new expectations compared to the previous period (Latham, 2011).

Numerous non-governmental groups reformulated their approach to development according to these new perspectives. The new economic policies shared by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Treasury Department were aimed at setting up the right economic initiatives to create favourable conditions for achieving stability and economic growth in situations of underdevelopment in the short term (Fusu, 2009). These pre-established policies were set up to ensure greater stability in financial terms, to ensure that there was more trade but at the same time, to try to bring underdeveloped countries into free market dynamics. The so-called "structural adjustment programs" were considered fundamental at the time to maintain these above-mentioned objectives and often served as prerequisites for receiving financial assistance.

Even in the event of a country's debt reduction, the initiatives of the Washington Consensus between 1980 and 1990 were followed, which envisaged the maintenance of a certain financial and economic stability, but always in line with the concepts of market opening, and privatization.

From the 1990s, several African countries were forced to accept conditionalities to receive foreign aid and aid was often tied to the implementation of structural adjustment policies, such as the liberalization of markets, the privatization of state-owned companies and the reduction of public spending (Ibid, 2009).

With the end of the Cold War, politics has treated development and aid in a fragmented way, no longer with the same importance given before. But this lasted until the terroristic attacks of September 11 and the subsequent war on terror that reshaped US government priorities into the African continent.

In fact, in the first decade of the 21st century, the United States significantly increased foreign aid, including the Millennium Challenge Corporation, with the hope of halting the growth of extremist movements (Ekbladh, 2013).

From the 2000s onward, US officials seemed to be interested in an evolution in foreign assistance. USAID has conducted its tasks according to this renewal of ideas.

The instability in Afghanistan and Iraq has placed demands not only on modernization but also on construction vis-à-vis various governments. This has led the Agency to invest much more and intensively, trying to collaborate also with the private sector and organizations in the area to extend the capacity of foreign assistance.

Under the Bush administration, special attention was paid to expanding U.S. foreign assistance. In the post-9/11 period, the expansion and reorganization of foreign assistance has been one of the most important prerogatives in US policy.

The Department of Defense and State and USAID strengthened relations by recognizing that development was only possible by sharing the effort to safeguard fundamental human rights and political and economic freedom in the countries in question.

This led to a renewed diplomatic commitment to ensuring the connection between security and development, later reconfirmed by Bush's National Security Strategy. The development, therefore, also retraced the past values of democracy and the fight against terrorism that were linked to the security aspect (USAID, 2024).

Today, the common goals of USAID and the U.S. government are framed in the concepts of development and modernization already outlined by Kennedy. Expanding democracy and the free market are the pillars maintained today, but development has also taken on connotations that were not present before. Among these, it was underlined the intention to ensure sustainable development, post-disaster aid and the improvement of people's living conditions (fight against poverty).

However, making underdeveloped countries self-sufficient has been an aspect that has been added to the development debate, a new conception of development aid and American policy (USAID, 2021).

In fact, between 2017-2020, under the leadership of USAID, the concept of development-related to self-sufficiency intensified even more in U.S. foreign assistance. As a matter of fact, the so-called "Journey to self-sufficiency" has been launched, i.e. a set of reforms aimed at trying to support local development but in the direction of allowing recipients to achieve self-sufficiency, or in other words, the step in which a state can manage alone its own economic and political advancement.

Under the Biden administration, there was a further evolution of ideas. USAID outlined the new concept of inclusive development. The administrator of the agency, explained this new concept of US policy as broadening the perspective of aid to different actors, including new partners and people in the development mission. Making development accessible and equitable for all. But at the same time, this concept translated into greater capacity in responding to development challenges, facilitated by the US increasing commitment to listen to emerging needs and expectations (USAID, 2021).

In conclusion, from the crisis of modernization theory, new approaches and concepts emerged. The new development models emphasized environmental needs and the fight against poverty, and it gave rise to the concept of sustainable and inclusive development that is still strongly considered today a fundamental criterion in US and Western assistance policies (Ekbladh, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN AFRICA AFTER THE END OF THE COLD WAR: HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

2.1 Evolution of objectives and interests within US administrations

In the Cold War period, U.S. policy in Africa was characterized by minimal economic and military involvement without significant intervention in the region. However, in the beginning of the 1970s, Africa became a priority within the U.S. policymakers' agenda, although this did not necessarily translate into increased US aid.

A shift occurred as the US and the Soviet Union intensified their struggle for political domination across the Global South (Chin & Bartos, 2024). During the Cold War period, the US strategy policy was based primarily on great power competition, specifically limiting the Soviet expansion. This sort of motivation guided the initial increased commitment of the US government.

Following the independence of most African states in the 1960s, U.S. policymakers perceived Africa as a battleground for facing the Soviet influence. Consequently, the promotion of democracy that has consistently been a key objective in US foreign policy programs, was neglected in favour of an anti-communist stance, preferring in many cases strategic goals over democratic principles and human rights (Cooke, 2013).

2.1.1 The Clinton administration

The demise of the Soviet Union changed the US strategic priorities that had dominated the political landscape until that moment, leading to a temporary situation of strategic shift in the 1990s. Subsequently, under the first period of the Clinton administration, some priority was given to humanitarian involvement, but without the pursuit of a specific objective of financial and diplomatic capacity in Africa.

All the interventions carried out by the United States have been defined by experts as ineffective in dealing with the crisis and conflict situations of the time. The so-called slogan "African Solutions to African Problems" had been criticized for demonstrating a certain detachment of US interests with respect to helping Africa more directly and effectively.

Nevertheless, in the second half of its term, the Clinton administration has succeeded in increasing U.S. engagement in Africa, generating greater awareness among the U.S. public and Congress (Ibid, 2013). Towards

the end of his mandate, the policy agenda for Africa followed two primary objectives: the emergence of specific African challenges such as the need to reduce debt and the issue of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act of 2000. In addition, the fight against AIDS has also taken a preferential position on the American agenda, increasing attention among both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

The second strategic element on Clinton's agenda seemed to focus on U.S. security on the African continent, the fight against terrorism and the ability to use energy sources. In this African context, an increase in terrorist networks occurred. In fact, in 1998, the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were attacked by these terrorist groups that killed 12 Americans, 245 Kenyan and Tanzanian citizens and injured thousands more. Therefore, Osama bin Laden's presence in Sudan and the spread of global terrorist networks in the 1990s made Africa an increasingly unstable region, which worried the U.S. government.

Finally, US interest was also focused on the energy issue. West Africa represented a possible source of high-quality crude oil. As a matter of fact, at least 15% of U.S. imports relied on these sources, opening a major possibility for new investments in oil facilities and oil extractions (Cooke, 2013).

2.1.2 The Bush administration

After the election of the Bush administration, there was no expectation of a significant involvement in Africa. The president himself had initially reconsidered the strategic importance of the continent. However, US global priorities changed with the insurgence of Global War on Terror. The increased US involvement reflected the new prospects of the moment, increasing its engagement in Africa. After the attacks on the Twin Towers, US policy began to look at Africa differently, especially because of the Islamic terrorist threat. Considering the instability of the African territory, especially in the Somali area and the Sahel, the first preoccupation was to avoid the spread of terrorist cells.

For what concerns the second priority, the US government was willing to find also new sources of oil outside the Middle East. During the 2000s, the share of U.S. oil imported from Africa rose to 20 percent. It was important for the U.S. government to strengthen security around these areas in order to improve the control over energy sources supply.

These considerations have led to the perception within the Congress of a link between security and development, and therefore a possible strategy aimed at increasing the commitment to provide development aid (Ibid, 2013).

The Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) highlighted the risks of underdevelopment in Africa, underlining the equation between poverty, vulnerability, and terrorism. In fact, it was reported an increase of the U.S. commitment to the sub-Saharan region, with a previous investment of \$2.25 billion in 2001 to \$7.6 billion by 2008.

This Bush approach changed the priorities and focused on the US soft power and openness to multilateral cooperation. Basically, according to academics, within the political establishment, it was spotted as a sort of reshaping of U.S. engagement in Africa (Chin & Bartos, 2024).

2.1.3 The Obama administration

Once in power, the Obama administration declared three main foreign policy goals for Africa: accelerate Africa's integration into the global economy; strengthen the peace and security of African states; create more stable relationships with governments, institutions and civil society organisations.

Despite these high expectations, it was only three years after this declaration that a policy was outlined and defined. Political speeches emphasized the importance of concepts such as sustainable development, democratization, human security and Africa's greater involvement in the world system as a vital actor, but this remained pure rhetoric without making major changes in foreign policy (Cooke, 2013). Obama's inauguration in the U.S. sparked great enthusiasm initially in Africa, leading to speculation that there would be more significant and broader political engagement on the continent. However, these expectations have mostly been disappointing, as the Obama administration has offered little in terms of initiatives and major funding (Zezeza, 2013). This specific approach created a condition of stagnation in U.S. assistance policies, which brought a gradual and continued U.S. withdrawal from Africa (Chin & Bartos, 2024). During his term, Obama was forced to face major challenges such as the global economic crisis and instability in Afghanistan and Iraq. This has produced inefficiency in foreign assistance initiatives, manifested by episodes such as the appointment of Rajiv Shah as the USAID administrator with a delay of one year or the two years vacancy for the position of Assistant Administrator for Africa.

Beyond the problems encountered by the administration, there have been attempts by Obama to engage in foreign assistance initiatives. For example, issues such as maternal and child health, family planning, nutrition and tropical diseases have been considered thanks to the 2009 Global Health Initiative.

In addition, in 2010, the Feed the Future plan was also promoted for better management of agricultural productivity even for small farmers, and to set up a common plan aimed at food security and sustainable development of agriculture.

However, the following initiatives have not been received with the same enthusiasm as, for example, the initiatives of PEPFAR or MCC. This situation was probably influenced by the economic recession that prompted US Congress to focus its attention on domestic issues, showing some disinterest in efforts aimed at the health system or agricultural productivity (Cooke, 2013).

2.1.4 The Trump administration

Since his election, the Trump administration has maintained a similar policy to the previous administrations during the first two years of its mandate. Despite the president's lack of interest in considering Africa as a possible partner, the US government in collaboration with the Congress has continued with traditional policies. Initially, foreign policy towards Africa lacked a clear direction, and paradoxically, this has ensured a certain continuity with the projects launched previously. In fact, PEPFAR, MCA and AGOA have continued to play their long-term role in assistance policies.

However, after a period of partial disinterest, Trump's policy has taken on a very clear strategy in Africa, based essentially on the concept of "America First" and demonstrating the objective of cutting aid programs ineffective in guaranteeing American interests in the region (Westcott, 2019).

In this specific political context, the Trump administration has taken a totally different approach than previous administrations. Its policy was a maximization of primacy on the continent in a context of rivalry against other competitors such as China. The intent was direct and declared: it was necessary to convince African governments to choose the United States to improve US leadership.

The resurgence to great-power rivalry contrasts with the prevailing trend in Africa's international relations, which shifted significantly since the end of the Cold War. Under Trump, the US policies followed three fundamental pillars: increasing trade flows between the United States and African countries, limiting the Islamic threat and political instability, and ensuring transparency in the use of foreign assistance.

Between 2017 and 2018, the focus of U.S. policies in Africa was on great-power competition with China. As a matter of fact, in 2018, the "Prosper Africa" assistance project was promoted with the aim of competing with the growing Chinese and Russian influence in the region. The idea was to intensively increase trade flows and investments between the U.S. and Africa and to limit Chinese initiatives in Africa such as the Belt and Road project (Schneidman & Signé, 2024).

National Security Adviser John Bolton affirmed, in one of his statements, that the foreign assistance plan was intended to lend itself as a high-quality and transparent financial and trade solution for Africa, describing Chinese alternatives as predatory financial efforts (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

In general, Trump's policy in Africa has followed its own principles: establishing collaborative relationships with compliant actors, while limiting actors who do not intend to serve the interests of the United States.

The Trump administration has not completely detached itself from previous policies, recording aspects of continuity with previous administrations, especially regarding the partial disinterest in security and development issues. But despite this long-standing American political condition, the U.S. development model has prioritized an approach based on rivalry with China and US interests as primary goals in Africa. An approach that has not been lacking in criticism (Westcott, 2019).

2.2 Unpacking current strategy for Africa: The Biden administration

Despite the major changes under various administrations, many experts and analysts note that the importance given to the African continent and US strategic interests have gradually decreased in recent decades. Initiatives such as the Bush administration's PEPFAR and Obama's health efforts have been recognized as very important achievements. However, there is a decline in trade flows and especially in assistance to the continent. Since 2010, U.S. trade with Africa has declined by more than 50% and the same was for the diplomatic visits to the continent.

The U.S. lack of interest has been prominently manifested in the foreign policies of U.S. administrations, giving much more room for rivals like China to expand. As a matter of fact, China has become Africa's largest trading partner, with nearly \$2 trillion invested in projects and construction since 2005, and it holds dominant control over vast deposits of rare earth minerals essential for electric vehicles and defence technologies (Cooke, 2013).

In relation to this, Biden and his allies are promoting a different approach than the previous administrations. The intent is to achieve the four objectives previously mentioned within the current \$55 billion investment plan: promoting openness and open societies, delivering democratic and security dividends, promoting pandemic recovery and economic opportunity, supporting conservation, climate change adaptation, and a just energy transition.

However, it is commonly recognized that political direction under Biden follows several principles, including mutual respect, genuine partnership and an effort to build a multilateral force, particularly through African organisations.

Unlike Trump's approach, which framed Africa as a battlefield to challenge China and Russia, current policies seem more moderate and balanced with a greater awareness and recognition of Africa as a possible partner rather than a secondary player. Trump's predatory approach is criticized in this context for trying to pursue its own goals that Africans do not consider as an integral part of their national interests.

Differently, Biden tried to change the approach to African policy, replacing Trump's vision based on US benefits with the expectation of an equal US-Africa partnership (Rattner & Whitmore, 2024).

In 2022, during the summit of African Heads of State, the Biden-Harris administration announced the implementation of foreign assistance plan for the African continent. The US President Biden manifested its commitment to building the future of Africa, signalling a change of tone compared to the Trump administration.

During the presentation, optimism emerged about the importance of improving relations with Africa, stressing that any success for Africa would be a success for everyone, including the United States.

The National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, announced that the plan will cover an engagement by the US to provide approximately 55 billion dollars over the next three years with the intention to manifest African leadership, ideas and innovations towards current crises and needs, while making previous investments and initiatives in Africa more effective.

The current support program includes forms of sectoral assistance to face various challenges on the African continent, but it has also been created with the intention of promoting and strengthening existing programmes. Firstly, Prosper Africa is one of these existing plans taken into account by the US administration. It can be described as an initiative already launched by the U.S. government to strengthen two-way trade between African nations and the U.S. in 2018 (BBC News, 2022).

According to Prosper Africa, the financial program produced 800 agreements in 45 countries, with a total value of \$50 billion in exports and investments over the past three years, thus challenging the perception that the United States is not commercially engaged within the continent (Prosper Africa, 2024). Considering the results, U.S. companies and African leaders are certainly more likely to take greater advantage of the current U.S. plan.

Secondly, it is worth noting Biden's intention to enforce and implement the already established project of Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa). The US showed strong support to this initiative launched by Clinton and in accordance with the African Business Forum (Schneidman & Signé, 2022). The Agoa program provided African and other clothing manufacturers with special access to the U.S. market, and this brought commercial and economic advantages for Africa.

Finally, the recent U.S assistance program also includes the renewal of initiatives related to the Power Africa program, launched by President Obama to improve access for millions of Africans to electricity capacities (BBC News, 2022). The improvement and support of these programs follows President Biden's foreign and development policy line, which emphasizes pandemic preparedness and the use of different financing mechanisms to support national goals. In addition, US attention also focuses on national conservation, climate adaptation and a just energy transition as fundamental elements in contemporary development models (Schneidman & Signé, 2022).

These initiatives are accompanied by significant investments in sectoral aid to reduce transportation costs at a strategic West African port in Benin, \$350 million to create a more digital economy, and \$15 billion in trade agreements within the U.S-Africa Business Forum context (BBC News, 2022).

Moreover, 2022 was an important year, considering the renewed concern given to the sub-Saharan African area. The U.S. government recognized the enormous potential of this region, emphasizing its rapid population growth, free trade possibilities, natural heritage, and ability to influence through the regional votes at the United Nations. Based on this potential, along the implementation of the 55 billion plan for the next three years, the Biden administration launched also the “U.S. Strategy toward sub-Saharan Africa” with the objective of strengthening the partnership between the US and Africa. In fact, in his speech to the African Union last year, the US President showed its relevance declaring “none of this is going to be easy, but the United States stands ready now to be your partner, in solidarity, support, and mutual respect” (The White House, 2022).

2.3 The fundamental principles of Biden's new strategy for Africa

In terms of US strategies and objectives, the current President Biden's aid policy strategy is defined in a direct and detailed way in the aid program launched in 2022 to support sub-Saharan Africa. The administration mainly emphasizes four key pillars: promoting openness and open societies, delivering democratic and security dividends, promoting pandemic recovery and economic opportunity, supporting conservation, climate change adaptation, and a just energy transition.

These principles are part of the recent U.S. foreign assistance policies, and they are implemented through collaboration with allies and partners at the regional and global level. In US strategy, promoting common interests is revealed as a huge opportunity for the United States and African actors (The White House, 2022).

- Foster Openness and Open Societies

Generally, U.S. policies are designed to maintain the region open and accessible and ensure that governments and local entities can make autonomous policy choices aligned with international obligations. The concept of coordination between local companies and the U.S. government is considered necessary to reach the preferential degree of investment and trade, improve living conditions for citizens, and face potentially harmful activities by external actors such as China and Russia.

Working closely with African governments, civil society, and the public is one of the goals of the United States in order to maximize transparency and accountability mechanisms and promote shared democratic norms. Key elements include improving tax transparency, eradicating corruption, guaranteeing the rule of law and promoting judicial independence to prevent forms of injustice against citizens.

In addition, the United States supports African countries in exploiting natural resources, respecting the sustainable development principle and strengthening open and predictable supply chains (Ibid, 2022).

- Deliver Democratic and Security Dividends

Democracy and security are two objectives to be pursued in US programs. Biden's assistance policy aims to promote the strengthening of democracies and the fight against instability in the region. In this case, it is highlighted a close correlation between bad governance, corruption, human rights violations and insecurity, which can contribute to the emergence of terrorist groups and non-benevolent foreign actors. By addressing these issues and reaffirming the benefits of democracy, the United States aims to secure meaningful options for Africans, limit opportunities for negative actors, and reduce the need for overly onerous interventions.

Part of these policies are designed to combat authoritarianism and military coups that can lead to a deterioration of democratic principles. Therefore, cooperation with governments and regional bodies is preferred for the proper functioning of support programmes in order to address public dissatisfaction, which provides a pretext for coups d'état, populist movements and authoritarian leaders.

The U.S. program toward Africa includes continued U.S. efforts to support civil society, activists, workers, and reformist leaders; safeguard marginalised groups, and ensure free and fair elections. In addition, diplomatic efforts and development programs are projected to support African partners in responding to the causes of conflicts and to improve regional stability and security, investing in prevention and peace building at the local level.

In this sense, a certain priority is given to the fight against terrorism, with a commitment to increase collaboration with African partners and allies to achieve the common goals of countering terrorism and promoting non-violent approaches. All these elements are implemented by clear programs aimed at strengthening local institutional capacities in contexts such as: security, intelligence, justice and control of terrorist support networks (The White House, 2022, pag.7-8).

- *Advance Pandemic Recovery and Economic Opportunity*

Addressing the post-pandemic recovery and creating new economic opportunities is presented as the third key strategic pillar. In this case, US government manifested the issues linked to the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic risks were even more underlined if considered in the recent context of instability in Ukraine. For this reason, the United States has set the goal of guiding the African economies towards a less vulnerable economy. U.S. considered the idea of guaranteeing a more equitable recovery as a feasible objective in Africa that could help the US to recover part of its lost influence on the global arena.

These considerations lead the USA to give more importance to the health issues, especially to policies and programs aimed at facing the COVID-19 pandemic. It will fill gaps in African countries' pandemic preparedness and response, continuing to provide vaccines, delivering support, and activities to encourage vaccination, as well as diagnosis, surveillance, and training.

The United States is attentive to the research and detection of infectious diseases, to ensuring access to medical supplies for all, and to making vaccination campaigns more effective. Public-private partnerships and regional leadership, through CDC Africa and the West African Health Organization, are seen as critical to U.S.-led advocacy and interventions.

In addition, the US government also focuses on strengthening cooperation with African countries in order to promote sustainable economic growth and debt sustainability through multilateral and bilateral initiatives.

For example, the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) is designed to mobilize funds for economic strengthening and diversification of supply chains. This in accordance with already existing initiatives such as Prosper Africa, Power Africa, Feed the Future and a new digital transformation initiative (The White House, 2022)

- *Support Conservation, Climate Adaptation, and a Just Energy Transition*

The final strategic goal deals with the restoration of ecosystems and natural resources, access to energy, energy security, and the construction of sustainable supply chains. All of these are necessary in the fight against the global climate crisis.

Following this principle, the U.S. offers its influence, development assistance, and funding to support African partners to adapt and build resilience to climate impacts and increasing mitigation initiatives for a sustainable, low-carbon future. Coordination between the United States, African governments, civil society, and local communities is required to conserve, manage, and restore Africa's natural ecosystems, reduce global carbon emissions, and combat climate change. The U.S. prioritizes energy efficiency, renewable energy, and gas-to-power infrastructure, in line with global climate policies. The promotion of just energy transitions that respect the economic and social development standards of African countries is proclaimed as one of the objectives to be achieved in assistance policies.

Through the Presidential Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE), the United States commits to working with African governments critically exposed to climate impacts. Public-private partnerships will be fostered to develop and sustainably secure the critical minerals needed for clean energy technologies, and reforms that foster transparent investment, respecting human rights and international environmental and social standards (Ibid, 2022, pag 9-10).

- *Elevating the U.S.-Africa partnership.*

In addition, the US-Africa Summit was very important in the context of the objectives as it introduced a totally new intention in American policy to create a partnership with Africa. Biden, together with African leaders and the Chairman of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat, have been the spokesperson for this aspiration, promising greater collaboration both in addressing problems and in seizing opportunities.

The constantly evolving global context poses significant problems and at the same time requires an evolution of relations between countries. It is this consideration that pushes US government to create a reconciled relationship between the United States and Africa, which promise to collaborate more in the areas of technology, trade, environment and on the economic front. Based on this goal, the United States has promised to improve the presence and position of the African continent in international institutions to ensure a greater participation in solving global problems.

This promise will result in a US plan to include permanent seats on the UN Security Council for African nations and at the same time, firmly support the entry of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20. In addition, the partnership will be based on shared values such as respect for the UN Charter and the defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

All this will be aimed at solving the continent's food and climate crisis, health problems, economic fragility and problems related to corruption and human rights abuses (The White House, 2022).

Even in the strategy towards sub-Saharan Africa, the same intention is expressed to collaborate and improve the relationship between the United States and Africa. The idea expressed is to base the approach on greater listening, and on involving the continent in global challenges.

All global issues such as the security or development of Africa itself, according to the US government, will have to be discussed together as well as all US and African interests/objectives in the partnership. US government shows willingness to share priorities, discuss agendas, and identify each other's interests. The importance of discussion and high-level commitments for both parties are therefore posed, and even in the event of disagreement on an issue, the parties should not refuse a meeting or a possible discussion. All this is aimed at ensuring the achievement of priorities, but at the same time the benefits for the counterparts (The White House, 2023).

The aim of this collaboration is also to allow greater participation by African states. The main talk is of a greater effort by the United States in Africa through investments involving both large and small states. This approach is aimed at ensuring that the objectives of the AU Agenda 2063 are achieved quickly. The greater involvement with all African countries is also considered by the US government as an opportunity to promote democracies and create aligned allies. The support of these realities through foreign assistance and diplomatic support could be significant in order to reach more states and create a greater sharing of democratic values, especially at the international level.

It cannot be ruled out that a US-Africa collaboration will also support civil society. In fact, in this sense, the US is committed to helping and supporting local actors such as journalists, activists and NGOs who fight for good governance, transparency, egalitarianism, inclusion and women's rights. But this will not exclude support for governments and leaders who want to bring reforms and changes in the name of the values mentioned above.

Finally, the intent of collaboration and geographical/political grouping is therefore reiterated. In these cases, reference is made to greater collaboration with multilateral institutions, especially the AU and the Regional Economic Communities, to promote the interests of both sides. In this case, the commitment of the United States is also characterized by its purpose of involving African states in the forums of the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific, strengthening collaboration with the African countries of the Atlantic coast; and facilitate the connection between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, the U.S. will be more active in coordinating work with African and multilateral institutions to facilitate and better organize foreign assistance and goals to be achieved on the continent (The White House, 2023).

2.4 Multilateral/ Bilateral models: Understanding the US preference for Bilateral assistance

According to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. Congress has the capacity to propose, spread funds, and monitor external assistance for Africa. Over the past decade, assistance administered by the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for Africa has amounted to

about \$8 billion per year. In 2022, Nigeria, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa received more non-emergency aid than other areas in Africa.

Aid also comes through other US agencies, global accounts such as humanitarian aid but also multilaterally thanks to multilateral bodies such as the United Nations or development banks.

Great emphasis is placed on support for health programmes, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS, with around 70 % of annual aid managed by USAID going to these projects. Other funding is provided to improve agricultural productivity, economic growth, security, democracy promotion, respect for human rights, governance and education, and social services.

In addition, a particular size of aid to Africa is made available through multinational initiatives such as the U.S. President's Emergency Plan to Fight AIDS (PEPFAR), the Presidential Initiative Against Malaria, Feed the Future, Prosper Africa, and Power Africa.

However, foreign assistance is not only delivered through bilateral models, but also through programs implemented by multilateral agencies.

Assistance to international financial institutions is a concrete and integral part of the United States' aid programs to Africa. These funds are delegated to international financial institutions that have the task of promoting economic growth and development programs on the continent. The United States plays a role in approving the investments and projects of these institutions (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

For fiscal year 2023, the Biden administration has requested \$4.37 billion to show its support for the projects of international financial institutions (IFIs). The International Monetary Fund (IMF), multilateral development banks (MDBs), and associated multilateral trust funds focused on climate change and food security as main objectives of US funds. The demand exceeded, more than double, the fund provided in fiscal 2022. 95% of the \$4.37 billion for fiscal year 2023 was provided for MDBs, which finance development projects in low- and middle-income countries, and multilateral climate change and environmental trust funds. A large portion of the funds are allocated to the World Bank through annual contributions of previous multi-year commitments by the United States.

However, the Biden administration is committed to providing \$54.6 million for the African Development Bank and \$171.3 million for the African Development Fund (Every CRS Report, 2023).

The choice between multilateral and bilateral is a generally debated issue in American foreign assistance policy. The preference for one of the two aid allocation models is influenced by many interacting factors. Recent studies show that public opinion plays an important role in influencing the pursuit of specific foreign policies by Congress and the President of the United States, especially if these are divergent compared to public opinion interpretations (Milner & Tingley, 2012). The perceptions of a certain group of Americans about aid programs or a specific foreign policy initiative can impact the choices made by political leaders (PIPA, 2001). In this regard, the OECD, in one of its public reports, highlighted this influence of public opinion on U.S. development assistance, noting a certain importance in raising awareness of perceptions of U.S. aid policy.

Generally, in the field of aid, bilateral and multilateral models' foreign assistance coexist.

The multilateral model differs as it involves one more actor in the long chain of aid, and multilateral assistance generally implies at least one additional intermediary in the chain of delegation and distribution of aid.

The choice of a multilateral model implies delegating an international institution, and therefore many academics interpret it through the principal-agent concept to understand its implications. In a multilateral model, actors are incentivized to delegate their sources because they lack the tools necessary to make decisions autonomously. However, for the effectiveness of delegation, principals must benefit by reducing transaction costs or resolving collective action issues.

This system, while effective on the one hand, also highlights the issue of a partial loss of control of the proponents. In some cases, delegating actors are unable to fully control or monitor what the agent does, so in case of divergent preferences, this limited ability to observe can lead the agent not to adequately represent the interests of the proponents (Milner & Tingley, 2012). Moreover, burden-sharing within international institutions is an impactful factor in the application of multilateral models. According to Olson and Zeckhauser, countries divide the burden differently among themselves. Often a country's decision on the number of resources to be allocated to an international organization is based on its national interest. A theoretical model based on this premise suggests that in such a situation, larger countries tend to cover a larger share of the costs, while smaller ones contribute much less. This implies that the large share of the costs sustained by the US cannot be explained solely by moral or political reasons (Olson & Zeckhauser, 1966).

American policymakers understood the burden-sharing impact of aid delivered through multilateral organizations. As a matter of fact, during one of the congressional debates, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin pointed out that for every dollar that the United States made available to the Bank's International Development Association (IDA), approximately \$8.5 was donated by the other participants. In this regard, a multiplier effect could be evident, leading to a sort of emulation by smaller players that follow the reductions of the largest donor (US).

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the choice of multilateralism leads to costs for a country. The link between the benefits of burden-sharing and delegation costs implies a partial loss of control, which translates into less management over who receives aid, the projects financed, and the conditions imposed on recipients (Milner & Tingley, 2012). Recent studies show that the United States can exert some influence over international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, especially in the area of loan conditionalities (Dreher & Jensen, 2005). On the other hand, many analysts think that international institutions have a certain ability to make decisions without being influenced. However, what emerges from recent research is a certain distrust from US elites, particularly conservatives, towards international institutions. US domestic policy is often influenced by this perception of lack of control in the management of foreign aid and based on this, a move away from multilateralism in assistance policies is hypothesized (Milner & Tingley, 2012). It is therefore logical that when the preferences of the delegators are similar to those of the agent, delegation will be greater because control problems will be reduced. When, for example, the foreign policy of a national political group agrees with a multilateral institution, the costs of delegation are no longer so evident. Otherwise, opposition to multilateralism is more vehemently manifested because conflicting interests are pursued. As a result, the costs

of delegation increase and there is a strong contrast between the interests of the agent and the national political group (Epstein & O'Halloran, 1999).

In addition, evidence provided by scholars demonstrate that political division can also be a factor capable of influencing foreign aid policy. In the United States, Republicans and Democrats support different foreign aid goals, leading to a division in perceptions. Liberals usually seem to prefer the use of foreign aid to ensure economic development, while conservatives focus their concerns on geopolitical/commercial goals.

Basically, it is worth noting that the choice between multilateralism and bilateralism is a complex issue, characterized by several factors. The perception in the United States is linked to a certain distrust towards multilateral agencies that receive less funding than those allocated bilaterally. In fact, according to the data, the American public opinion is not supporting multilateralism in aid.

Even though multilateralism brings several advantages over bilateralism, policymakers in the United States do not give much multilateral financial support and elites still are divided between opposition and support on that matter. This probably influenced the perception of public opinion over the choice of a multilateral model in foreign aid (Milner & Tingley, 2012).

2.5 US Sectoral aid and its effects on growth

In the government's current strategies, there is clear attention to sectoral aid initiatives with reference to all those social and most vulnerable fields. The USAID agency is focused on guaranteeing, on the behalf of the American people, democratic values, a free and peaceful vision of the world and all investments aimed at saving lives and increasing prosperity. It operates in 29 sectors and provides investments in around 159 countries, using more than 1% of the Federal Budget. The main sectors considered are Government and Civil Society, HIV/AIDS, Basic Health, Operating Expenses, Maternal and Child Health, Family Planning, Agriculture, Developmental Food Aid/Food Security Assistance, Basic Education, General Environmental Protection (USAID, 2022).

Taking into account the health sector, US engagement in health has always been an important element in US assistance strategy. Within the current plan, the Department of State and USAID support the implementation and application of Global Health Programs. Moreover, federal bodies like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) work to guarantee the functioning of additional health programs aimed at fighting the infectious diseases.

In this regard, a consistent size of budget is allocated to support HIV/AIDS care and prevention under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in Africa (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Furthermore, it is worth noting that PEPFAR facilitates regional access to hundreds of thousands of health workers to fight and provide the services needed against HIV/AIDS (White House, 2023).

The second category of infectious disease is Malaria. Fighting Malaria is one of the huge challenges in Africa. As a matter of fact, it was necessary to extend the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) to three new

countries: Burundi, Gambia and Togo (Congressional Research Service, 2023). In addition, the United States is investing to combat the spread of malaria with the support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the WHO, the AU and other local actors in Africa (White House, 2023).

Alongside Health engagement, the US government wants to foster also economic growth through the agricultural sector. Reinforcing value chains, improving land fertility and enhancing sustainable farming initiatives are all elements included in the US agricultural programs. One of these is the USAID project launched by Obama "Feed the Future " that was extended with the aim of reducing food insecurity and promoting more sustainable practices in the agricultural chain (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

For what concerns, instead, Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning sector, the programs are strongly guided by the USAID, and they provide newborn, and early childhood care. Family planning and reproductive health assistance are project designed to work on: access to contraception and efforts to curb child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and gender-based violence, among other issues (Ibid, 2023).

Moreover, the US administration is also focused on climate change vulnerability in Africa. As a matter of fact, the Department of State and USAID lead a set of initiatives aimed at mitigating and addressing the effects of climate change through efforts to assist economic growth. The Biden administration worked to enhance and improve environmental initiatives such as Power Africa, which is promoting the construction of electrification plants under the effort of USAID, but also guarantees technical assistance, loans, financial risk management and greater access to energy, especially renewable energy.

In addition, Power Africa also supports the financing of fossil fuel and power generation projects by trying to involve the private sector to ensure greater efficiency. The US engages in the implementation of environmental assistance with initiatives projected for biodiversity conservation and wildfire. USAID promotes the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), which is the most important founding program of environment aid for Africa. At the same time, CARPE is also engaged in safeguarding conservation and sustainable land practices in Congo, and it worked in collaboration with local entities to limit wildlife trafficking and other environmental crimes in Africa (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

Education is also relevant as it is one of the main sectors where the US is involved. DA is considered the main channel for U.S. education and social service assistance for Africa, including all levels of education in the support plan. DRC is the main recipient country for primary education programs, and Malawi is the country that receives more aid for higher education in Africa. U.S. support to education also covers the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), a higher education program that prepares African students through important training and mentorship initiatives (Ibid, 2023).

Therefore, food security and aid to health workers is another sector where the US is active. During the FTA, the Biden administration committed to providing \$2 billion to address food insecurity in Africa and about \$4 billion has been promised to secure more African health workforce by 2025, as a global proposal for health workers under the leadership of the State Department and USAID (Ibid, 2023).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the relevance of digital Transformation field in Africa (DTA). The DTA was launched as an initiative to ensure greater access and digital literacy in Africa. The Biden-Harris administration wants to provide over \$350 million and facilitate over \$450 million for the support of DTA.

The Administration is also engaged in African politics, introducing ADAPT, a new initiative to support governments and civil society in a swift and flexible way during delicate phases of political transition. Moreover, a White House document promised an investment of 75 million dollars to avoid a possible democratic backlash, always with the participation and involvement of regional bodies, governments and civil society (Ibid, 2023).

In general, this framework of sectoral aid gives an important key towards the understanding of the American foreign assistance system, showing the relevance for US policy of sectoral aid as well. However, given the many initiatives mentioned, it is also important to understand how sectoral aid can influence the economic growth of beneficiary countries.

Analysing the effectiveness of structural foreign aid allows a better understanding of the foreign assistance programs. Academics discuss the importance of heterogeneous effects of sectoral aid on their respective sectors, underlining that it is better to take into account each sector in order to have clear results on the sectoral responses after aid allocation.

Recent findings demonstrate that sectoral aid has different implications for each sector and, consequently, it is not feasible to analyse the effects from a total growth perspective. The aid–growth nexus is more applicable when the research focuses on the responses of various growth sectors after the respective introduction of aid allocation.

According to this analysis, sectoral foreign aid flows can affect the respective growth sectors (industry, agriculture and services) in developing countries.

For example, in the case of aid to the industrial sector, industrial growth responded negatively in specific situations, because of its lack of organization and capacity in industrial processes in the MENA and SSA regions. Differently, agricultural aid can depend on the location and conditions of the country. For example, it was noted that a tropical location can be a factor capable of improving agricultural growth.

In general, the allocation of aid to growth sectors can be transitory and fungible in one growth sector, while being non-fungible in another. Moreover, in SSA countries, the effects of the allocation of aid in terms of growth of each sector are influenced by the financial management within each sector and the sectoral institutional quality (Aljonaid, Qin, & Zhang, 2022).

Academics have also noted a certain influence of structural aid on the growth of the Human Development Index. In this sense, recent data and results showed a positive relationship between education aid and growth. In general, aid inflows can positively affect the Human Development Index, but it is important to properly assign aid to sectors with an important capacity to increase human development.

However, findings suggest that sector-specific aid and institutional quality are interrelated, and they can have effects on increased per capita income, health, and education.

The institutional performance in countries is fundamental to maximise the benefits of aid. The institutional quality can influence the management of monetary processes and influence trade openness in developing nations. The authors suggest that aid allocations should be directed more strategically to countries with stronger institutional frameworks to ensure high growth and development. In this way, aid can be used to build infrastructure, to trade new technology and concepts, to improve social abilities, to face humanitarian crises, and to recover the economic system after a financial shock (Gillani, A. S., & Gillani, D. Q, 2023).

In general, sectoral aid is effective if it is implemented in a context of good financial management and efficiency of the institutions. In this way, structural inefficiencies that could compromise the effect of the aid are avoided. Significant efforts are therefore considered necessary to improve the management of sectors, in particular industry, in developing countries in both regions (Aljonaid, Qin & al, 2022).

2.6 Key achievements of the Biden administration

According to statements provided by the White House, from the USA-Africa Summit in December 2022, the Biden administration has continued to deliver on its promises, significantly increasing the United States' commitment to meet its \$55 billion investment in Africa over three years.

Over the past year, the African Union has been integrated as a permanent member of the G20, but significant achievements have also been made in the areas of trade partnerships, food and health security and digital transformation, improved governance, and collaboration with the diaspora (White House, 2023).

Within trade sector, the results are significant. In 2023, 547 new deals with a value of \$14.2 billion were closed between Africa and USA, with a reported increase of 60 percent compared to 2022.

Prosper Africa provided \$274 million to the housing sector in West Africa, with the result of guaranteeing major market opportunities and facilitating about 6,000 households across West Africa to gain access to property.

Moreover, the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) mobilized more than \$2 billion across 46 transactions in Africa through plans provided for supporting strategic infrastructure, job creation, small business growth, agricultural productivity, improved health outcomes, and open access to critical minerals.

Finally, the U.S. Department of Commerce worked to increase U.S. exports to Africa with an investment of 3.6 billion dollars, and it enforced long-term commercial partnerships within fields like digitization, clean tech, creative industries, climate-smart agriculture, and infrastructure (White House, 2023).

For the infrastructural sector, President Biden committed \$600 billion to realise the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI) in order to increase infrastructure capacities in the continent.

Since December, \$1.5 billion under the PGI was delivered to build the Lobito Corridor, fundamental infrastructure for transportation and connection in Africa.

DFC launched an investment of \$250M to the Lobito Atlantic Railway consortium to improve the functioning of Benguela rail line and minerals terminal from the Lobito Port in Angola to the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Moreover, EXIM also participated in these initiatives, providing 1.6 billion to improve U.S. exports to Africa and \$1.2 billion to help the PGI project. These funds were also delivered for solar projects and bridge infrastructure in Angola, and commercial aircraft to Ethiopia. EXIM's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa has hit \$8 billion, marking an historical investment in the region (Ibid, 2023).

In terms of Digital Transformation results, in 2023, \$82 million were successfully delivered to support new digital infrastructure, projects, and technical programming included in DTA.

DFC participated in the creation of Africa Data Centres' (ADC's) the newest data center in Ghana and a new data center in Kenya, with a \$300 million investment.

The U.S. Department of Commerce financed the first of two Africa Youth Summits, giving the opportunity for young Africans to learn, to train, and to access networking, and mentorship opportunities. Moreover, the Women in the Digital Economy Fund was created by Vice president Kamala Harris to close the gender gap. Trying to create a Digital Enabling Environment, MCC is cooperating with Togo to launch a \$20.5 million project to enhance competition and digital connectivity for its citizens.

U.S.-Kenya Cyber and Digital Dialogue was performed by the US department to discuss policies and regulations for a safe, inclusive and efficient digital space (White House, 2023).

Considering also the food security issues in Africa. The United States increased its food assistance with an investment of more than half compared to other African partners, with a \$17.2 billion plan.

In 2023, the United States promoted the launch of the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS), with the support of UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the African Union.

Improved agricultural productivity and nutrition were the main points to reach according to the VACS plan.

Through the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), the United States has invested about \$300 million to improve the productivity of food systems and smallholder farmers (Ibid, 2023).

Moreover, Diaspora Engagement was another concern for US policymakers. President Biden appointed the 12 members of the President's Advisory Council on Engaging African Diaspora in the United States (PAC-ADE), a specific Council created to strengthen cooperation and to increase opportunity for African Diaspora communities with special improvements in public- and private-sector collaboration, trade, investment, development, and educational links and exchanges.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) works in coordination with Togo and Cote d'Ivoire to increase coordination between small businesses on both continents.

In terms of business cooperation, a trade collaboration project between American companies and the African workforce was promoted, especially in the personal care and cosmetics sectors. (Ibid, 2023).

Alongside diaspora engagement, the Department of State was extremely active in security matters. As a matter of fact, the US Department under the ADAPT project, will provide funds to assure a democratic

transition in Guinea by 2025. Support and technical assistance will be guaranteed to create a constitution and prepare the country for the future political elections.

The United States is engaged in supporting local entities, regional bodies, democratic and political parties, and civil society democratic. Moreover, the intent is to extend The ADAPT program to other African countries on the brink of a political transition. The 21PAS provided \$100 million over the last year to promote effective, responsible, and accountable defence institutions able to meet the emerging threats of our time (White House, 2023).

Finally, the United States is also one of the world's largest donors for global health, ensuring health security and global health. In this sense, the US is committed to working with African governments and regional and global partners: the World Health Organization (WHO) and the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), the private sector and civil society.

Since the 2019 pandemic crisis, the U.S. government is fighting and cooperating with global, regional, and national bodies to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats. The US government increased its effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, with an investment of \$215 million that contributed to the delivery of 128 million COVID-19 doses in 2023 (Ibid, 2023).

2.7 Final considerations over US general objectives and the new policy implications in Africa

Historically, many analysts have called U.S. support for Africa episodic as goals and strategies have evolved along the way. In many cases, Africa has never been seen as strategically important. The new US-Africa strategy differs from previous initiatives and objectives for Africa and represents something new in the support given to Africa.

The end of the Cold War was strategically an important opportunity for the United States to change its approach and reshape African geopolitics. Otherwise, this did not happen, underscoring a lack of engagement and interest within US policy that limited the opportunity to establish a mutually beneficial partnership with African countries (Usman, 2022). Compared to the policies of previous administrations, the idea of elevating the partnership between the United States and Africa is positioned as a novelty in American policy towards Africa. As a different way of managing relations with Africa and its leaders. It is thought that this change of tone translates into a response to the growing accusations of negligence by US politicians towards the continent (Nzuki & Dizolele, 2024).

Generally, according to academics, U.S. engagement in Africa has historically been influenced by three groups of interests and political goals. One of these is based on national security considerations, aimed at avoiding or managing direct threats to the security of citizens and to the United States itself. Commercial interests, particularly those of some powerful energy and mining companies, are part of this sphere, although they have been pursued discreetly until recent issues.

The second group identified is based on ideological values, such as the promotion of democracy and human rights, poverty reduction and humanitarian crisis management. Interests that have always been part of the US agenda and that reflect the vision of the role of the United States in the world.

Finally, the last group of goals emphasizes the importance of the U.S. to have global leadership and to exercise soft power in international relations.

According to many US administrations, Africa has represented the perfect place for ideological battles of influence and global leadership. As a matter of fact, U.S. governments have often viewed Africa as a region in which to compete with other powers to support their global foreign policy goals.

The succession of events in Africa and within the United States influenced which political objectives to choose by the administrations. Security, governance, and economic opportunity were key pillars in US politics. However, sometimes these objectives could not be all feasible, with possible tensions and forms of incoherence in the policies implemented. Promoting a series of values through assistance often lacked clear and defined interests to guide them. Similarly, pursuing pragmatic interests without a backing of values could lead to accusations for the US.

The trajectory of strategic interests and objectives of the United States is considered by many academics to be relatively downward and unrepresentative of local situations in Africa (Cooke, 2013).

What seems clear to many analysts of the new phase of American involvement in Africa is the fact that expectations for the Biden administration's African policy should not be too high. Over the past two decades, Republican presidents have done more for African countries than Democrats, with George W. Bush giving the most attention to sub-Saharan Africa.

However, Bush and many other presidents have contributed to the fragmentation and proliferation of uncoordinated assistance programs for Africa. Every president in the last twenty years has launched his own presidential initiative for Africa (PEPFAR, Power Africa, Feed the Future, Prosper Africa), and it is said that Biden has also done the same, possibly focusing on the fight against climate change and sustainable development. Nevertheless, the lack of a comprehensive and strategic approach is highlighted, which is preferable to the usual presidential initiative. In the new strategy, emerges a defined change in tone that seems to be more respectful, but no significant changes in politics. Moreover, the "American dream" in Africa is being challenged by China's growing cooperation and commitment (GIGA, 2022).

Overall, according to some scholars, Biden's African strategy is not totally clear, the objectives and principles to be followed are well-defined, but there is little indication on how to promote democracy or deter and reverse coups d'état in the region.

Although the United States aims to provide aid but at the same time combat human rights violations by security forces in bilateral talks, it lacks a roadmap and a clear set of principles. Very often the US government uses positive incentives and punitive measures but in a poorly organized way. In fact, government decisions often are adapted to the situations to be faced, increasing the inconsistency and lack of strategic effectiveness of US policy. As a demonstration of this, the leaders of Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, accused of having seized power violently, did not participate in the USA-Africa Summit in 2022, but the political leader Mahamat

Déby of Chad was invited without any problem (Chin, & Bartos, 2024). The United States' strategy towards sub-Saharan Africa has not led to the realization of many new economic and development projects. Rather, as mentioned earlier, existing assistance initiatives, such as Power Africa, Prosper Africa, and Feed the Future, are strengthened and promoted. The Biden administration has not rejected previous initiatives but has highlighted a clear need for reworking and reinvigorating policies for Africa.

Academics highlight the need for a change in the relationship between the US and Africa, but this does not necessarily imply a change in a positive sense. Indeed, it is argued that the likelihood of growing pain is not excluded, especially because of the current U.S. approach to African states that seems to follow the history of paternalism and rejection on the international stage. Changing this situation seems complicated but necessary to establish a real partnership (Nzuki, & Dizolele, 2024).

Meanwhile, the impacts of US aid on economic and social development are still limited. In this regard, according to a recent United Nations report, there is a negative trend in African economic growth, which rose from 4.1% in 2022 to 3.8% in 2023. In addition, regional challenges such as migration in particular from West to North Africa still persist. The same goes for food security and hunger in North Africa, which still present a critical situation, affecting over 36 million people.

Many speculate that U.S. policy toward Africa will not bring about major changes in the short term.

Moreover, even if the United States bases its policy of assistance on collaboration with allied countries, the interests of the international community are often in opposition with each other. An example of this is France and Italy, which have divergent approaches to managing illegal immigration from Africa. The administration does not seem to have the determination to address these disagreements, limiting the creation of a harmonized multinational effort. Therefore, the administration continues to pursue an African strategy that primarily mirrors its domestic political agenda, satisfying only its political supporters.

Finally, for what concerns the long-term analysis, this policy is defined as unsustainable as the presence of China and the population growth expected in Africa over the next years, are increasingly posing obstacles to US foreign assistance (Carafano, 2023).

CHAPTER 3

AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AND CHINESE INFLUENCE

3.1 The historic arrival of China in Africa

After the Chinese Civil War in 1947, Africa took a central position on the Chinese political agenda. During the Cold War, the Chinese government supported several African independence movements, and subsequently, the renewed African importance was witnessed by the first visit of the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to an African country (Chatham House, 2023).

China has long forged ties with Africa. For example, in 1956, Egypt was one of the first countries to receive help from China. Even in the 1970s, the government actively participated by taking charge of a major project for the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia railway to connect the copper mines of Zambia to the ports of Tanzania. Between the 1980s and 1990s, many African countries received subsidies and loans for infrastructure in exchange for African countries recognizing the People's Republic of China as the only China and breaking off any relationship with Taiwan (Desjardins, 2012).

African countries have been crucial for China as they have supported the latter to regain a seat at the United Nations. In 1971, China's seat in the United Nations General Assembly was restored with 78 countries voting in favour, including 26 votes from African countries.

In 1989, the Tiananmen protests and Chinese repression led to condemnation by many international actors, forcing China to recalibrate its foreign policy and interests. Criticism from the international community, including on aspects such as human rights, laid the foundations for a different foreign policy. The new role of China saw a renewed commitment to supporting international organizations such as the UN and regional alliances.

After the 1990s, there was a renewed collaboration between China and Africa. In fact, the Chinese foreign minister visited fourteen African countries between 1989 and 1992 and subsequently, several African delegations were also hosted in Beijing as a sign of an ever-increasing effort.

China's new policy promoted new assistance plans such as \$12 million in assistance to Mozambique in the early 1990s, and the Chinese government sought to find the support of many African countries on human rights and sovereignty to demonstrate Chinese non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries.

This political wake led to a substantial increase in trade flows with Africa, especially in the first half of the 1990s. Estimates were at \$1.66 billion in 1990 and reached \$5.03 billion in 1997.

Aid and investment were very frequent and were provided by China if political stability was guaranteed within the beneficiary countries.

This led China to support even countries with undemocratic leaders that were considered eligible for foreign assistance (CGTN, 2018). In 1999, the "Going Out" strategy was carried out with the intention of investing outside the country. This initiative already highlighted the increase of Chinese economic power in the world but above all established greater Chinese involvement in Africa. In this perspective, more investment was provided, enlarging the labor market also for Chinese working on new infrastructure projects.

By November 2003, China's effort had grown even further, represented by the first summit in Beijing of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This forum was conceived as a means of creating greater cooperation between African states and China and at the same time, it reaffirmed the strategic importance of Africa in the Chinese political agenda.

In 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strongly expressed China's commitment to Africa. The intent was to recreate a sort of silk trade route along the coast of East Africa. Initially, in fact, Chinese investments were directed towards East Africa, but the BRI has also been extended to the rest of the continent, creating advantageous opportunities for many other African states and for China itself.

The BRI has been instrumental in delivering numerous infrastructure projects in both Asia and Africa. Often these investments have led to a heated debate on the non-transparent nature and origin but also on the risks of loans for African countries.

In 2016, Chinese aid peaked, at its highest point. However, they suffered a setback in the following years, starting at \$28.4 billion in 2016 and reaching \$1.9 billion in 2020. The hypothesis of this has been found in Chinese policy, which has probably redefined its priorities, but also in the difficulty of African governments in repaying Chinese loans (Chatham House, 2023).

The 2016 year was crucial for Chinese foreign affairs because it officially established its foreign assistance policy towards Africa. The document defined the five main principles of Chinese policy in Africa including: respect for sovereignty, non-aggression against other sovereigns, non-interference with each other in internal affairs, mutual benefit and equality and peaceful coexistence.

According to the document, China is committed to respecting the five pillars mentioned above and the policies chosen by African countries on development. All this was accompanied by support for the United Nations and other international organizations. In addition, it was evident an important commitment to continue high-level visits to the most vulnerable regions to ensure the pursuit of sustainable projects and autonomous management by beneficiary governments.

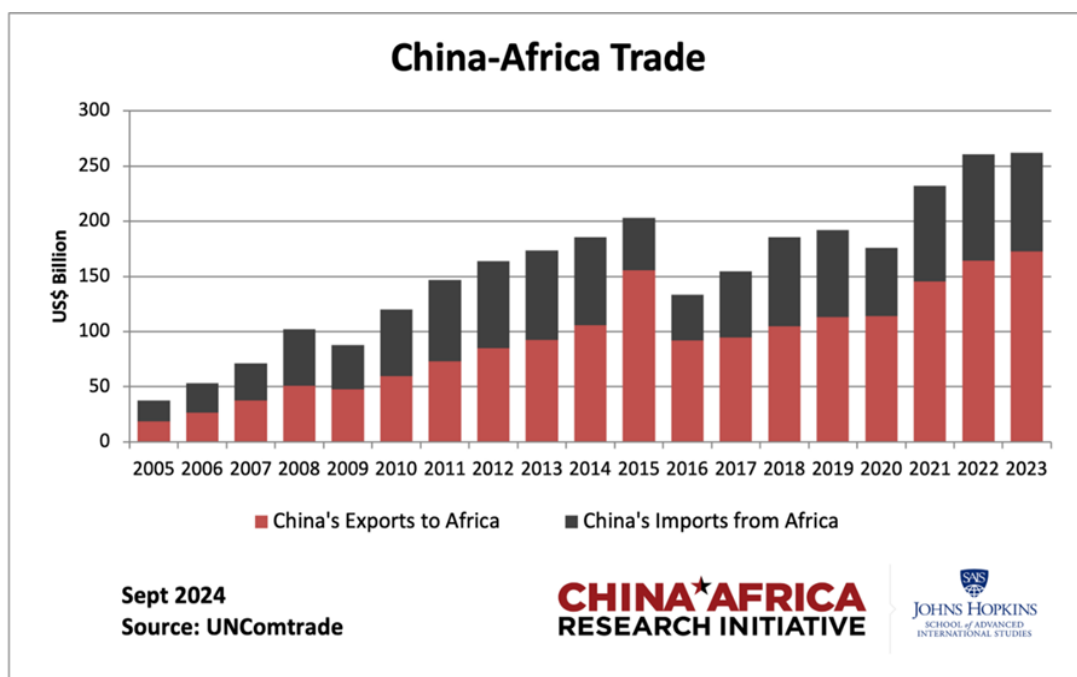
On the economic side, China committed to eliminating customs duties and other possible obstacles, such as tariffs on exports imposed on raw materials from Africa. Loan forgiveness is another important part of foreign aid policy.

In general, on the civil level, China promoted relations with Africa in various fields including the health, education and social sectors. In addition, a military commitment to adequately prepare the African armed forces, joint exercises and exchanges, cooperation on the rule of law and judicial projects and for civilian police

practices is also reaffirmed. What emerges is the importance associated with China-Africa cooperation and the effort to achieve the development goals stated above. Overall, the policy document takes on a positive tone and represents what Beijing has communicated through official and public channels (Desjardins, 2012).

3.1.1 Trade between China and Africa

Trade between China and Africa stands out for being a very important sector for the interests of both countries, increasing its influence considerably over the past two decades. China-Africa bilateral trade has reached an increasing trend in recent years. Despite a modest decline between 2019 and 2020 mainly due to the Coronavirus crisis and the inefficiency of supply chains, the import and export indices between China and Africa have returned to growth exponentially from 2021 onwards, totalling a value of about 262 billion dollars. This has led some African countries such as Angola to be the main exporter to China from Africa in 2023, along with the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa also following the latter's footsteps. On the other hand, South Africa itself has taken on the role of the main buyer of Chinese products in 2023, along with Nigeria and Egypt (China Africa research initiative, 2024).



According to data from the International Monetary Fund, China has strengthened its position in Africa to such an extent that it has managed to establish itself as sub-Saharan Africa's main bilateral trading partner. The region's exports to China are estimated to have reached 20 %, and African imports from China account for 16 % of the region. Mainly for exports to China, raw materials such as metals, mineral resources and various fuels are preferred, while imports mainly concern Chinese machinery, manufactured goods and electronics from China. These remarkable bilateral flows led to a record value of \$282 billion in 2023, confirming the positive trend mentioned earlier.

The presence of the Chinese private sector also adds a certain value to China's commercial influence; it is no coincidence that 70% of 3,000 Chinese companies belong to the private sector and are very active in Africa. In this perspective, the number is expected to increase more and more as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) advances, which will make the African market more united and create much more instant access for Chinese businesses (World Economic Forum, 2024).

However, academics see some very interesting recent trends in the trade field between the two countries. One of these concerns the index of African imports from China which exceeds that of exports to China, thus resulting in a modest trade deficit. This trend has faced different periods and phases.

In 2009, the global financial crisis hit many countries and affected the formation of the first deficit in trade flows between China and Africa. The situation was similar but more sustained between 2012 and 2015, a period in which there was a deficit of between 0.8% and 2.9% of the GDP of African countries following the greater commitment between the two countries but also due to the drop in the prices of raw materials on international markets which affected the value of African exports to China.

Subsequently, despite the fact that there has been a steady growth in exports since 2016, Alan's report confirms the data initially mentioned by UNcomtrade which would seem to indicate that the COVID-19 health crisis and the advent of Russia's war in Ukraine have led to another modest deficit in trade flows between China and Africa, more precisely of 1.9% of GDP in 2019 and 2.8% in 2021. However, after this period of decline, in the years following 2021, import and export indices returned, partially reducing this deficit trend with 2.6% of GDP in 2022 (Moses, Ngui et al, 2024).

Another trend that emerges but should not be underestimated is the fact that Africa-China trade is mainly about the supply of raw materials for finished products.

According to the data, the period between 2000 and 2022 saw a significant increase in Chinese exports from Africa, especially of extractive resources. It is recorded that 89% of total exports are based on the mining sector, 6% on agriculture and finally, 5% are based on manufacturing.

As for Chinese exports to Africa, it is estimated that the flow is based mainly on the manufacturing sector, which totals 94% of total exports and with only 2.5% in mining. These data highlight a trading model that is based on the exchange of primary commodities for finished goods.

This trend is also increasingly confirmed by the 2022 data on the top five export flows from African countries to China by trade value, which came mainly from the mining sector. In this case, reference is made especially to raw resources such as oil and transitional raw materials. Angola and South Africa are certainly two of the main countries for crude oil and iron supply respectively, followed by Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which export crude oil and copper.

At the same time, in the range of the top five exports from China to Africa, as mentioned above, there is a certain relevance of the manufacturing sector with South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria and Ghana being leaders in importing telecommunications equipment, footwear, textiles and automobiles (Moses, Ngui et al, 2024).

This system of trade, in which there is a certain preponderance of oil and mineral supply in African exports to China, proves to be very important for the strengthening of Chinese development. The growing supply of oil to China allows it to support the development of the Chinese economy.

At the same time, the metal minerals copper, iron, aluminium that come from Africa are fundamental to increase the so-called green technologies in China (Chen, 2008).

The case of Chinese exports to Africa is different, as they do not bring any renewable energy technology to the continent, despite the opportunity of increasing a possible trade flow in the direction of energy transition and renewable energy for the African continent (Moses, Ngui et al, 2024).

In general, this potential is not yet being exploited and China-Africa trade follows a traditional exchange approach based on African primary natural resources for Chinese manufactured products, with advantages that seem greater for China but with potential still to be exploited for Africa.

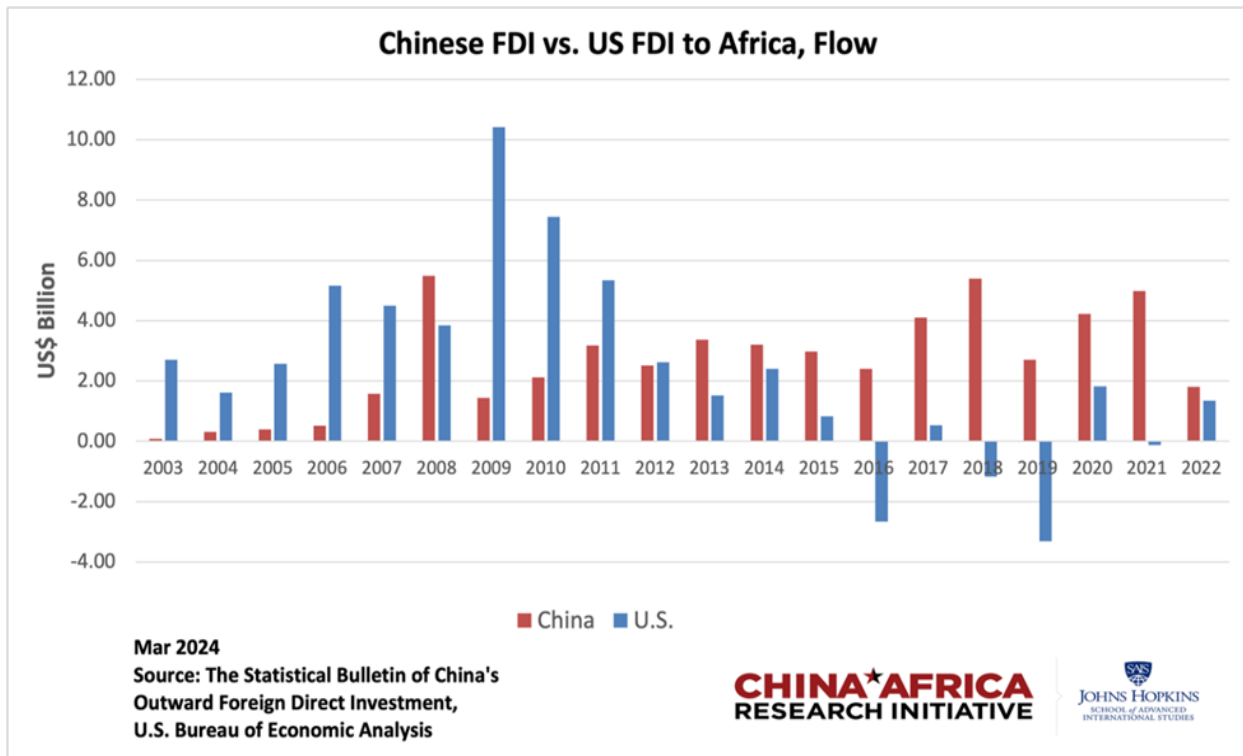
3.1.2 Chinese FDI

Since 2003, Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Africa has increased significantly. Investments totalled approximately \$75 billion in 2003 but reached \$5 billion in 2021 and fell back to \$1.8 billion in 2022.

According to the overall data between 2003 and 2022, the highest point was recorded in 2008, a peak at which \$5.5 billion in FDI was reached following the acquisition of the shares of the Standard Bank of South Africa by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).

But even more relevant to this analysis is the comparison between the US and China in the allocation of FDI to Africa. Thanks to the graph visible below, it is possible to see that since 2013 Chinese investment indices have exceeded the US FDI, which started a decreasing and strongly downward trend compared to China.

In this context, South Africa, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt and Côte d'Ivoire were the first African countries for Chinese FDI received. The United States, on the other hand, sees Egypt, South Africa, Libya, Equatorial Guinea and Angola as its preferences, but in some cases, the U.S. government has been reluctant to send investments for security and protection of its companies' sensitive business data (China Africa research initiative, 2024).



Generally, FDI is seen as a viable alternative to loans, which can put an African country's debt situation in difficulty. In this sense, FDI enabled African countries to have more capital at their disposal to complete the economic initiatives desired for their own development.

Concerns about excessive debt and the difficulty of repaying it to China have influenced FDI to provide capital and invest in the African continent.

Chinese FDI data estimates that between 2000 and 2022, Chinese investment flows totalled \$112.34 billion in greenfield FDI and \$24.60 billion in acquisitions (M&A) for the creation of infrastructure from scratch and for the completion of existing projects respectively. In the early 2000s, greenfield investments maintained a steady and stable pace. On the other hand, M&A movements have increased significantly, especially in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. As for the most recent period, after the pandemic crisis, growth has been noted in both investment flows, highlighting the potential for future growth.

Of the \$112.34 billion of greenfield FDI, 30% is allocated to industry and trade/services (ITS), 27% to energy, 25% to the mining and non-energy processing sector, and finally, 6% to the technology and communication sector. On the other hand, 12% covers together several sectors such as transport, water/sanitation/waste, agriculture, health, financial services.

Industry, energy, and transition materials are positioned as the top investment preferences for Chinese companies. As a matter of fact, there are many greenfield FDI and M&A projects in the mining and processing of raw materials such as oil, copper, aluminium and iron.

It is no coincidence that countries rich in natural resources such as Algeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Nigeria, Niger, Zambia and Zimbabwe are the main recipients of FDI by

China. In this case, Africa represents fertile ground for Chinese supply concerns for green technologies and renewable energy infrastructure. The trend is different in FDI flows for renewable energy, which are still limited and poorly structured (Moses, Ngui et al, 2024).

3.1.3 Infrastructural dominance

China's presence in the infrastructure sector has achieved a dominant position on the African continent. One of the trends seen in the last two decades is the Chinese government's commitment to financing African infrastructure projects, making it the ultimate financier. As a matter of fact, this megatrend is confirmed in the fact that China manages to finance one project out of five and to build one out of three (Deloitte, 2024).

Already in 2017, the Chinese State Council had issued a document highlighting the commitment to invest in telecommunications, transport and energy resource infrastructure.

Mainly the commitment to infrastructure is found in the development of logistics (transport, seaports, and railways) with support reaching 52.8%. However, efforts in the energy sector should not be underestimated with 17.6%, real estate 14.3% (including industrial, commercial and residential properties) and mining with 7.7%.

According to recent data, China's infrastructure policy has reached 200 infrastructure projects in Africa. And work is underway to implement projects to create about 30,000 km of highways, as well as rail and port projects to create 2,000 km of railways respectively and to increase annual capacity by 85 million tons in port transport (Ibid, 2019).

In China's infrastructure commitment, the 2013 Belt and Road Initiative program has had a very important impact, trying to start a process of urbanization desired and sought for a long time on the African continent (Haas, 2024). Several international actors have ratified the initiative. There are about 105 countries and international associations that have joined the initiative by signing the documents relating to the BRI. In 2018, there were 37 African countries and the AU as participants in the FOCAC and BRI meeting. There is increasing growth under the initiative, with trade flow between China and BRI countries reaching or even exceeding \$5 trillion in 2018.

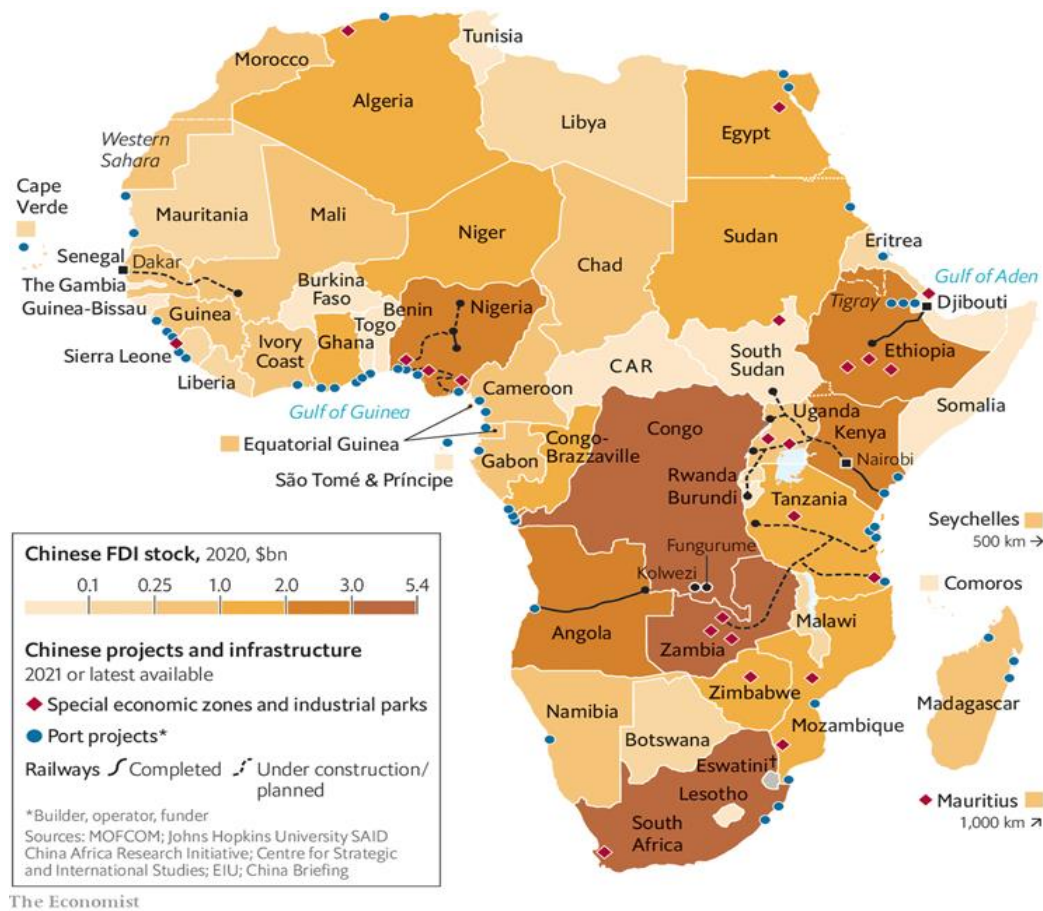
70 billion dollars was the share reached by Chinese FDI through the BRI, but progress was not limited to this; in fact, the project brought the construction and the signature of engineering contracts worth over 500 billion dollars. In addition, also in 2018, 82 trade cooperation zones and industrial districts were created with the aim of increasing the workforce and production efficiency in Africa and the rest of the world.

China's economic development is going through a phase of internal evolution and the industrialization process is acquiring much more value. This value was exported abroad by state-owned enterprises, using all knowledge and skills in the implementation of infrastructure projects (Deloitte, 2024).

The quest to connect African trade and economic hubs with China and the rest of the world was the main motivation for the BRI, which in 2023 counted 44 out of 54 African countries in favour of the initiative.

Furthermore, according to recent estimates, China's commitment to African infrastructure is 2.5 times greater when compared to all Western actors.

According to experts, a well-defined and effective infrastructure plan can really create positive spillovers or so-called multiplier effects on the economic and commercial development of the continent. Not to mention that urbanization brings with it an increase in investment, in workforce, a growth in the internal market and trade flows. In the short term, it generates demand for goods and services, especially in the construction field (Haas, 2024).



3.1.4 Chinese influence in finance and lending

According to ISPI (2020), China has an increasingly dominant position in the financial lending sector. Between 2000 and 2018, China was considered as Africa's largest bilateral lender, surpassing the OECD and catching up with the World Bank.

The promise to guarantee more than 150 billion dollars between 2000 and 2018 has made China a fundamental player in the African financial context. As a matter of fact, from a geostrategic point of view, China's lending

system to Africa creates concern about the excessive indebtedness of countries on the continent and the seizure of key resources in Africa.

In the context of debt and lending, development banks have a key role. In the Chinese case, the two main development banks: the Export-Import Bank of China (CHEXIM) and the China Development Bank (CDB), have made loans worth about 134.01 billion dollars available to 47 African countries.

Instead, \$36.07 billion was provided by actors such as state-owned commercial banks, corporations and the Chinese Foreign Aid Agency.

It is estimated that the sum of the loans mentioned above, i.e. USD 170.08 billion, is provided for 35% to the energy sector, 29% to transport, 8% to technology and communication and 5% to financial services. However, it is also fair to specify that Chinese loans to Africa have declined in recent years compared to 2016 when they were higher.

Generally, what has turned out is that in recent decades, lending has focused mainly on the energy sector and raw materials. Reference is mainly made to fossil fuel projects financed by loans from Chinese banks. On the other hand, there has not been a large increase in investment in renewable energy.

In addition, energy occupied another important part of the loans as well as the mining sector. Analysing the energy loans of the Chinese DFIs, it emerges that Chinese development banks follow two main directions: one follows the goal of accessing the continent's energy perhaps through the construction of hydroelectric infrastructure, on the other hand they try to obtain mineral resources and raw materials such as oil (Moses, Ngui et al, 2024).

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the issue of excessive debt of African countries.

The lending Chinese initiatives influence particularly the debt of African countries. Africa's debt situation since 2000 is very particular as it has drawn a decreasing line indicating a growth in public debt on the continent. In this sense, in 2021, the International Monetary Fund estimated a median public debt/GDP ratio in Africa, particularly in the sub-Saharan area, of about 28.8%, which, reached 59.1% in 2022, showing an increase of about 30%.

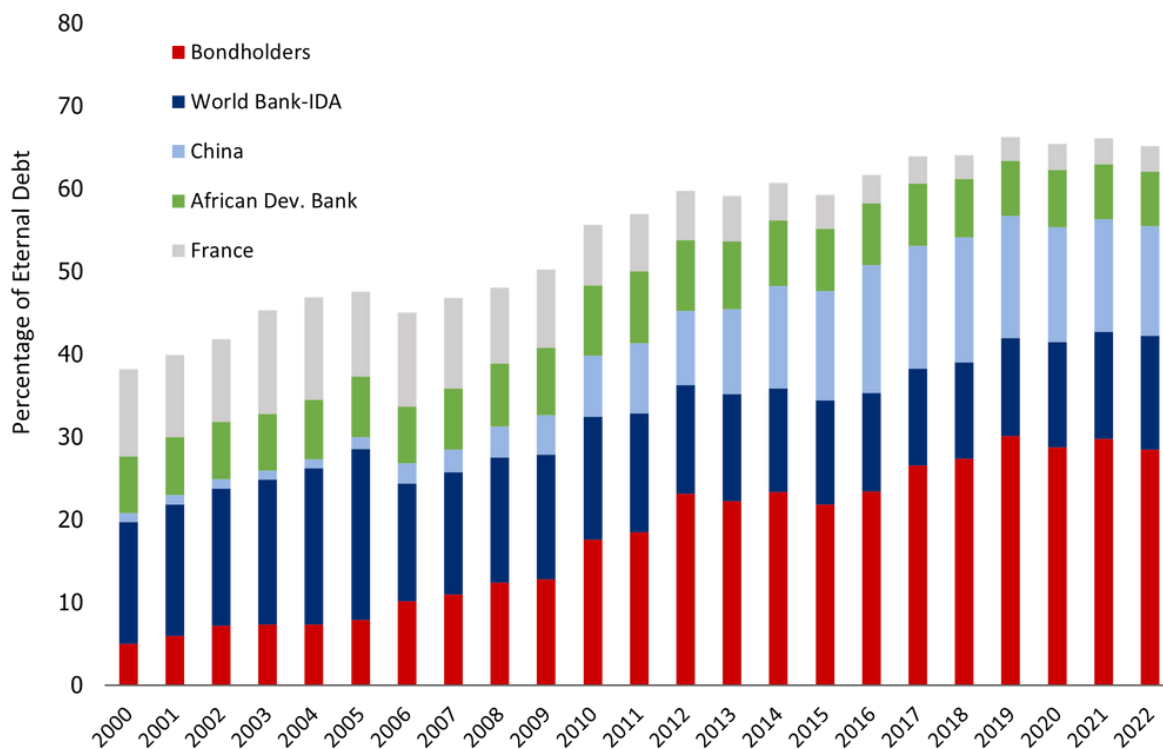
In addition, it is important to note that external debt as a percentage of GDP in Africa has grown by 13% since 2010, exceeding the figures recorded in all other continents (Gallagher et al, 2023).

These figures should not be underestimated as it is expected that the debt-to-GDP ratio is set to increase even more in 2024, reaching 65% in 2024. This forecast further highlights Africa's debt problem, which is proving to be increasingly susceptible (Kedir et al, 2023). All this is also caused by the recent global financial and energy situation, difficulties in energy and food imports, rising debt-related interest rates, and the increasing possibility of rollover (AfDB, 2023).

At the same time, alongside this debt situation, China has actively participated in Africa's external debt in recent decades. More precisely, it went from 1% of external debt in 2000 to 13% in 2022, roughly equal to the World Bank.

The peak in debt is referred to 2016, the year in which China had reached 16% in African external debt, underlining a significant peak in Chinese infrastructure loans in that year. However, it is fair to point out that

in addition to China, there are numerous players influencing African debt. Bondholders, as well as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and France are involved in debt stock. In 2022, around 65% of the total debt was mainly in the hands of China and these above-mentioned actors, marking a significant difference from the year 2000 when there was a total of 38%.



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2024. Data Source: World Bank International Debt Statistics, 2023.

The situation is that many African countries are heavily indebted to China. In 2022 the African countries with the highest debts to China were Angola with \$20.98 billion, Ethiopia with \$6.82 billion, Kenya with \$6.69 billion, Zambia with \$5.73 billion and finally, Egypt with \$5.21 billion.

Thanks to the intervention of the IMF, Angola was able to partially cope with this situation between 2020 and 2022. The Group of 20s (G20) Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and the IMF intervention have tried to reach an agreement with Chinese creditors, managing to stem the risk of a default. Along with Angola, Kenya has also managed to recover by avoiding an economic recession. However, other African countries such as Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia have not been able to avoid this problem, going into default.

Considering this issue, China has generally chosen not to cancel the debt completely but rather it has preferred the restructuring of debt or the cancellation of expired zero-interest loans (Moses, Ngui et al., 2024). The situation in this specific case remains complex, considering rising interest rates and the vulnerability of African countries. The continent's over-indebtedness and related costs force Africa countries to avoid further debts with China (AfDB, 2023).

The problem of the debt trap is certainly an issue that also emerges among the concerns of the US government. This debt situation is often underestimated by both China and the recipient states. It becomes complicated for financial institutions to analyse these dynamics. The assessment of debts and the probability of repayment are inscribed in this context as elements that are difficult to decipher once China is involved. The accusations by the US open a considerable debate on the issue. Many U.S. officials mentioning, the concept of "debt trap diplomacy," highlighted China's intentional action in influencing debt processes in Africa (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

However, in the debt discussion, there are many interesting views and observations to analyse. Many academics define "debt trap diplomacy" as a narrative that has yet to be proven.

On the one hand, China certainly wields very important financial power that allows it to improve its relations with the recipient countries. Through loans and other financial instruments, the Chinese government can support African debt without specific conditions. At the same time, China does not put a particular focus on financial sustainability or the rule of law in its practices. This undoubtedly creates unequal economic situations, and the debt trap becomes a real and concrete risk (Himmer & Rod, 2022).

In this context, it becomes legitimate to think that China, despite not explicitly stating it, is aware of the debt situation of many countries but at the same time it does not show any qualms about helping already indebted countries.

However, according to the analysis of Himmer and Rod, (2022), debt trap diplomacy is not strongly supported by academics as it does not demonstrate, for example, China's real intention to use this practice to obtain strategic assets in exchange. This consideration is supported by episodes in which China has opted to postpone debt payments, as in the Kenyan case, instead of demanding ports or mineral rights in return.

According to empirical evidence, China has in many cases given up on the potential of debt, not demonstrating a direct malicious intention.

Certainly, on the other hand, the Chinese government has taken advantage of an opportunity to try to strengthen its influence on the African continent.

The actions of borrowing states also appear to be in line with this observation. In some cases, the behaviour of the recipient states has been found to request financial aid for political and non-political reasons. This request for financing from China has largely stemmed from the greater flexibility and convenience in choosing the Chinese option.

In fact, China is defined as a creditor country with a high rate of flexibility and leniency in debt matters, and it is precisely this characteristic that puts it above other creditors (ISPI, 2020).

In conclusion, it can be deduced that China has a significant impact on debt, as it owns a large part of the debt of many African and non-African countries. This is clearly a considerable advantage for China, and it has risks in relation to the debt trap and the development of countries.

However, the intention of a Chinese debt trap diplomacy is still much debated as it is not convincingly demonstrated by empirical evidence (Himmer & Rod, 2022).

3.2 Different types of aid and funding processes

The Chinese government has several forms of aid flows. According to Yuan, Su and Ouyang (2022), there are several forms of Chinese aid: complete projects, goods and materials, technical cooperation, human resources, development cooperation, medical teams, outgoing volunteers, emergency humanitarian aid, debt relief, and South-South cooperation assistance fund.

What emerges is that these streams are provided through grants in most cases and through interest-free loans or concessional loans in fewer cases. The most relevant form of aid in Chinese policies is identified in the "complete project", the basic model of Chinese assistance. This model was created during the war in Vietnam and North Korea with the aim of repairing the affected infrastructure. Subsequently, it was expanded to cover the construction of infrastructure for public facilities, agriculture and industry, also including more recent climate projects.

The projects are mainly related to public facilities: in 2021 were reported 306 Agriculture structures, 19 hospitals, 58 agricultural pilot centres, 5 schools, 86 agricultural land water conservation, 2 civil construction, 19 agricultural transformation, 6 well drilling and water supply, 6 public infrastructure, 60 industry, 63 climate change programmes, 13 economic infrastructure, 80 wind and solar energy and 10 transport projects (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Complete projects are defined as such because the assistance provided covers all phases of the implementation of the projects up to their completion, thus including the financing and technical assistance necessary for the project to be realized. For this reason, this model is also known as "turnkey" model.

Even though, the Chinese government has increasingly opted for the implementation of "pilot" projects, i.e. for more accurate and transparent project management for the construction of infrastructure. According to this policy, economic support and technical assistance to such projects is provided by China and as far as other aspects such as project design and administration are concerned, it has been entrusted to the receiving countries (Ibid, 2021)

The so-called "turnkey" service model that involved the construction and subsequent return of Chinese technicians and workers was no longer considered reliable and effective. This perspective led to a decrease in Complete projects from 580 in the three-year period 2010-12 to 423 in the three-year period 2013-18.

Nonetheless, it remains a key model of assistance in Chinese policies, even more so given the 2013 launch of the BRI, which focused on infrastructure projects as pillars for China's international development cooperation. Moreover, Chinese assistance has also begun to consider the development of human resources and the increase in trade between China and the recipient countries. This has led to the reinforcement of education and development of preparation, with an increase in resources in favour of these areas. In this regard, there has been some increase in African students in China, evidenced by an estimate of 20,744 in 2011 to a peak of 81,562 in 2018. Along with all this, scholarships funded by China and destined for Africa have also seen a major increase in recent years (Yuan, Su & al, 2022).

The Human Resources Development Cooperation sector has occupied a significant position in China's assistance policies. In recent years, China has provided nearly 7,000 training sessions and seminars for foreign officials and technical staff, managing to spread knowledge and awareness in areas such as politics and diplomacy, public administration, national development, poverty reduction through agricultural development, medical and health care, education and scientific research, culture and sport and transport (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

In addition, China has not only provided support to young students, but it has also dealt with African elites with programs that allow them to develop skills in governing. This form is considered as a means of soft power, as this training is intended for people who are likely to occupy high positions or become high-ranking officials and future leaders of their countries.

Moreover, according to Yuan, Su and Ouyang (2022), two other important streams of foreign assistance can be found in medical and health care. In this case, China provides help through medical teams, hospital projects, medical training assistance, equipment and public health programs. Among these options, the possible deployment of medical teams, are an important means in terms of diplomatic relations. In fact, China's effort in this area has been very significant in the fight against Covid-19, sending medical teams to 27 countries and providing medical tools to more than 150 countries.

Finally, the last, most substantial form of aid can be found in the creation of the Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation (SSCAF) in 2015. The fund was created with the aim of promoting projects with the support of a range of actors, including international organizations, social organizations and think tanks, to achieve the development goals of the 2030 Agenda. Thanks to the SSCAF, 82 projects were carried out in 2019 with the help of international organizations, thus becoming not strictly a Chinese-only initiative but a form of international assistance involving multiple actors in the field of sustainability and project implementation (Ibid, 2022).

For what concerns the founding processes, most of the Chinese fund allocation mechanisms fall into the category of OOFs, i.e. loans, export credits and investments that have different criteria/conditions than Official Development Assistance. Under these specific terms, China provides loans to underdeveloped countries to finance development and benefit-bearing projects such as hydroelectric dams, roads, railways, and other types of impressive infrastructure. The repayment of this loan takes place subsequently through the supply to China of raw materials such as minerals, oil or timber, or with all those resources that are generated by the new structure built.

However, it is fair to specify that this practice raises doubts regarding the sustainability of these projects that could have side effects, but also there are risks of excessive debt for African countries that could always depend economically on China.

In 2000, the Chinese government strengthened its trade ties with Africa through the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) with the intention of creating mutually beneficial economic development by intensifying trade and political relations. Delegation meetings during FOCAC strengthened cooperation at bilateral and continental level, and several initiatives were promoted. In 2006, the FOCAC Summit made \$5

billion available for Africa, doubling aid and helping to build an African Union headquarters. Through these political-economic initiatives, the Chinese government has managed to facilitate investments to the public sector, but at the same time towards the private sector.

In this system, the role of the China Development Bank is fundamental as it can invest in convertible bonds, shares, investment funds and other types of quasi-equity investments that can become a kind of catalyst for private sector investments. In fact, according to estimates by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, about \$540 million earmarked for 27 African projects will be complemented by about \$3.6 billion of private sector investment by Chinese companies. These initiatives and investment models make it possible to carry out major works and bring investments in an easier way. In this way, China positions itself as a major player in foreign assistance to Africa, and at the same time it reinforces its strategic value on the continent (Desjardins, 2012).

3.3 Peculiar conditions of Chinese assistance: Political, commercial and prestige interests

According to Harchaoui, Maseland and al, (2021), the hypothesis that China uses foreign assistance to promote its own commercial interests and create an exclusive economic zone in Africa is an important element to analyse in the context of Chinese interests. The data analysed in the wake of this hypothesis identify the models and aid flows that Chinese government used to attract more trade flows to its internal market, thus increasing the economic dependence of some beneficiary countries on China.

What emerges from these assumptions is that the use of ODA has been promoted to strengthen ties between China and aid-recipient governments, thus allowing an economic benefit for Chinese companies as they have privileged access to the resources of these countries.

This aspect is also witnessed by Ye (2022), that through its analysis shows a certain relationship between interests in mineral resources and Chinese foreign assistance. Generally, African countries with more natural resources are positioned in a situation of preference for China, which is more willing to provide aid. According to empirical evidence, the higher the percentage of mining rents (of GDP), the more the percentage of China's aid increases from 0.30% to 0.39%.

As a matter of fact, according to Moses, Ngui et al. (2024), China has invested significantly through finance and trade in the energy and transition materials sector of the African continent. There have been many interests in these areas. So much so that the Chinese government appears to have invested both in electrification projects such as power plants, transmission and distribution lines and solar and wind farms, but at the same time, it is also very active in the mining and raw materials sector, trying to find as many resources as possible.

However, it is specified that this strategic use of Chinese aid does not respect the principles of good governance, recording a negative relationship between ODA and the quality of governance, i.e. risks to democracy and increased corruption. On the other hand, regarding OOFs, a positive correspondence with the quality of governance is detected. In this case, it is assumed that China will use this type of aid to enter into the markets of the recipient countries that are associated with a positive institutional quality. In fact, OOFs are

said to be used to make it easier for Chinese companies to export to countries with good institutions and good growth potential. These results show some credibility of the hypothesis that China can use foreign assistance (ODA or/and OOF) to facilitate access to its companies on the African continent and to create a kind of economic dependence on China.

These results do not contradict the initial assumptions and are indeed in line with the idea that China provides aid strategically to further its commercial interests. The patterns that have been observed appear to be in concordance with the "Chinese economic-strategic" narrative.

Moreover, the significant increase in Chinese foreign assistance to Africa proves capable of promoting Chinese commercial interests. As a matter of fact, from an economic point of view, Chinese initiatives in Africa tend to create a viable commercial alternative for China to Western markets. With more and more countries dependent on China, the Asian power is strengthening its role as an economic and institutional influence. As a result, the dynamics of development in Africa are influenced by Chinese policies that have become fundamental not only at the African level but globally (Harchaoui, Maseland al, 2021).

The empirical analysis by Min Ye (2022), finds a positive confirmation of the importance of Chinese political and economic interests in Africa. The prospective that China gives much more aid to its trading partners is significantly confirmed. As a matter of fact, it is highlighted that the more foreign trade between China and an African country increase, the more there is an increase in Chinese foreign assistance: a 1% growth in foreign trade implies a 1.25% increase in the allocation of Chinese aid.

Therefore, also the political affinity plays a significant role, demonstrating a certain preference of China towards countries with similar political ideas or positions. In this case, it is noted that a similar position or vote at the UN General Assembly with China, leads to an African country being supplied more with Chinese aid.

Going deeper into the political context, China had different political expectations about the goals it wanted to pursue through foreign aid. If initially the strategic and political value of foreign assistance was not considered much, this perception has changed in more recent times, especially in the 1990s. The value of China's image internationally has taken a preferential position on the Chinese political agenda. In fact, the acceptance and legitimacy in the international community of a "unique China" has been pursued as a fundamental political objective, thus also trying to regain a position of relevance in the UN Security Council.

In the 1990s, China offered aid to many African countries with the intention of countering and delegitimizing Taiwan's model of assistance, thus leading many countries to support China.

The Chinese aid model has made possible to strengthen China's role in the UN assembly, creating important ties with countries that supported Chinese policies. Mutual support between recipient countries and China has allowed the Chinese government to conduct its policies without being hindered by the UN Human Rights Commission on Human Rights. But, in addition to this, China has also managed to use these alliances against Taiwan, which could not join the World Health Organization after the opposition of many African countries. Demonstrating the strategic political role of Chinese aid, a report by the European Council on Foreign Relations argues that within the General Assembly, political support for Chinese views on sovereignty and against external interference rose from 50% to 74% between 1998 and 2008, recording a significant increase.

These results demonstrate a clear, non-explicit intent to forge an alliance system that can be strategic in an international key. Chinese foreign policy is seeking support to be able to strengthen its positions in decision-making contexts of international organizations (Ye, 2022).

The aspect of leadership and diplomatic influence can be also found in China allocation of aid through the form of "prestigious diplomatic" projects. The sponsorship of the construction of a new parliament in Zimbabwe or the headquarters of the African Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Addis Ababa serves, according to the academics, as a symbolic means of highlighting China's political and global leadership in the world. Many of these projects are part of China's motivation to achieve a certain political prestige, positioning itself as a guarantor of modernization and support for Africa. All this is part of the context of strategic competition between China and the US, trying to create a positive image internationally (Narang, 2024).

According to Narang (2024), Chinese motivations for supporting infrastructure are part of the logic of gifts, through which the image of the giver is helped to grow and at the same time support is given to the recipient. In this case, we are not just talking about debt or control, but the assistance provided serves to safeguard Chinese interests abroad.

Many of these policies are set up outside of loans or direct investment. In fact, government centers or large, high-profile buildings in African countries are considered initiatives aimed at enhancing China's reputation. For what concerns the peculiar characteristics of Chinese foreign assistance, it is worth specifying that Chinese foreign aid has different principles than US aid. One of these is the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of beneficiary countries. According to official Chinese documents, assistance policies should not influence political conditions in any way, interfere in internal affairs, and impose specific choices or development models. This principle is considered by the receiving countries as act of respect for sovereignty and non-interference by the Chinese government.

However, there is no shortage of criticism, as this policy favours the economic participation of authoritarian or corrupt governments. In addition, it is also important to note the role of Chinese finance that tends to mask commercial interests with subsidized flows.

The fact that subsidized flows coexist with other financial flows leads to a situation in which it becomes complicated to identify commercial interests from those purely intended for development.

The other aspect to consider is a certain influence of demand on the decision to provide aid. As described by Dreher et al, (2020) the decision to allocate aid in many cases takes place following a request from the governments of underdeveloped countries, but the real problem is the fact that decisions on aid are discussed exclusively in high-level negotiations without a public discussion or greater transparency on the development goals to be followed. This system produces a not transparent use of aid, thus promoting the clientelism of local heads of government. An approach that requires the delivery of assistance projects offers the governments of the recipient countries the opportunity to use the funds, strategically, to pursue their own political interests and not those of the country's development (Isaksson & Kotsadam, 2020).

This issue related to lack of transparency and participation in the decision-making processes is also spotted in the Chinese banks for development.

Since 2014, China has created its own infrastructure investment bank to promote development in Africa: The New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

These Chinese institutions offer an alternative to Western institutions such as the World Bank and other Western development banks. What has emerged in recent years is a shift by China from benefactor to banker. This change has had a major impact in managing all the unintended consequences caused by Chinese aid. For example, these institutions have partly limited democratic control over negative consequences such as involuntary resettlement due to large plants or dams built in African territory. The real problem is linked to the lack of transparency towards society. Many projects supported by Chinese banks, the AIIB and the NDB, do not allow direct access to decision-making and consultation procedures for civil society entities, which, having a greater knowledge of the territory, are essential to avoid possible side effects of these projects for the populations. In addition, the accessibility to information and transparency procedures of Chinese banks are very opaque, as they allow Member States to decide which documents to keep public and which to classify. Also, regarding complaints, the NDB's procedures do not confer any right of complaint for individuals or citizens harmed by a foreign assistance project. Unfortunately, a certain awareness is shown that the complaints are and will be many but probably they will not come out because of these unclear and not transparent procedures.

Even if the World Bank enforces guidelines for "free, prior and informed consent" to protect communities, for example, who are at risk of being resettled and losing everything to internationally funded projects. And even though, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples itself requires that communities should not be forced to move from their territory, Chinese banks seem to be able to circumvent this FPIC clause, changing formally the C clause from Consensus to Consultation. In this sense, all the progress made by international banks and institutions aimed at giving greater guarantees for all possible consequences of aid, such as resettlement, could be called into question by these unclear practices. The side effects of large foreign assistance projects could re-emerge in an important way due to Chinese policies that disadvantage the most vulnerable in the name of efficient development (Koch, 2023).

3.4 Some of the socio-economic effects of Chinese aid in Africa

According to the analysis of the effects of Chinese aid, the researchers note a positive relationship between infrastructure projects and African economic development. Generally, Africa's infrastructure gaps can be filled in large part by Chinese intervention. These projects have strengthened the African economic system, fuelling the growth of the countries in question.

Some elements that have favoured economic and social development have also been noted. In this sense, a positive relationship between Chinese aid and certain elements such as political stability, population growth

and industrial production has been designated. Considering the combination and the various characteristics of aid provided by China, several advantages emerged, highlighting a favourable situation for both sides. These results are positive data for the theories of development economics, and they are certainly considered as positive examples in the management of foreign assistance for development.

However, the data and analysis provided do not fully take into account all the benefits, not guaranteeing a vision of the long-term impact and economic sustainability of these policies. The social effects are not always positive or may hide behind the economic ones. In addition, the infrastructure policies maintained by China can guarantee even more results in the long run, leading to a scale effect and increasing industrialization and logistics effectiveness (Madzoke, & Wu, 2024).

Although the economic results are positive in many analyses, there is also evidence of negative consequences in the context of Chinese aid. Some initial hypotheses manifest themselves in a positive relationship between the increase in Chinese aid projects and local corruption. There is less transparency in the projects proposed by China, with episodes of bribes and suspicious situations. These factors do not seem to be driven only by the increase in a country's economic performance, but they emerge in correlation with China's involvement in the territory. For example, an analysis of the World Bank's aid projects does not reveal a correspondence between the implementation of these projects and the increase in local corruption within the proximity of the development projects.

The opposite result emerged in the case of China's aid projects, with a greater correlation between foreign assistance and local corruption. In addition, Chinese initiatives are also estimated to have a limiting effect on union engagement in the areas under consideration. The reduction in unionisation rates is not manifested through other forms of civic participation, such as, for example, activities not directly linked to the project location. So, this does not affect a change in citizens' civic behavior. In fact, this reduction is not due to institutional transformation or changes in social norms, but instead by anti-union policies applied during the implementation of projects by China.

Moreover, it is also interesting to note that aid can also influence support for incumbency, those in office or in power. In this sense, aid from the World Bank seems to be able to increase popular support for those who govern. Otherwise, it does not seem to be the case with Chinese aid, as empirical results lead to insufficient evidence that Chinese aid increases popular support for the incumbent government. This leads to the conclusion that although a government receives aid from China, this does not translate into more support from the population.

Finally, there may also be effects from a social point of view caused by the allocation of aid or by specific projects. Proximity to an ongoing Chinese project can have implications for ethnic identities that are strengthened. When compared with the projects of other benefactors such as the World Bank, the opposite seems to occur, as ethnic identity manifests itself less. Elements such as ethnic competition for resources could lead to increased identification and ethnic contrasts during all development projects to grab more resources. However, this is not the case with projects funded by the World Bank which take more into account than

Chinese projects issues related to discrimination or competition among neighbouring populations (Isaksson, & Kotsadam, 2020).

Another fundamental aspect is the relationship between Chinese aid and possible side effects of civil conflict. In this sense, several studies have been conducted to try to identify which impact Chinese foreign aid could imply over the possibility of civil conflicts or situations of instability in Africa. What emerges is an inverse relationship between Chinese development loans and conflict situations, thus expressing a low probability of instability. However, on the other hand, infrastructure aid or more generally Chinese aid for specific projects show a greater correspondence with the impact of the civil conflict.

Precisely on this result, a discussion is opened to try to better understand this difference. The first hypothesis is based on the consideration that the countries that receive Chinese loans or aid use them to improve their governmental capacities and economic activities. So, the result seems logical because with a situation of political and economic stability, the probability of conflict seems to be lower. On the other hand, the negative relationship can be explained by the fact that the receiving countries use Chinese aid for other purposes, for example, for military purposes to suppress the insurgency. This second hypothesis seems to be confirmed by other academics who underline the side effects of western and Chinese aid, citing conflicts as consequences of the provision of aid (Assefa, 2024). In this case, authors speak of direct effects of the conflict, i.e. situations in which rebel groups manage to have access to resources provided through foreign assistance, strengthening their military capabilities and gaining ground on the continent with violent activities. But there are also indirect effects as foreign assistance can not only be diverted to other purposes but can become the cause of internal conflicts between communities, ethnic or other groups, and/or between recipients and non-beneficiaries (Koch, 2023).

In this context, foreign assistance should consider improving institutional performance to seek to reduce conflict and instability. This can be ensured through aid, but only if local policies bring some political and economic prosperity back to the population. Conversely, if foreign aid is used as a sort of plaster to hide the inefficiency of local institutions, then aid loses its effectiveness. The debate around the effects of Chinese foreign aid is certainly very wide. Generally, Chinese aid has impacts that would have been in-depth and not considered as a black box or in other words as something inexplicable.

The results that emerged highlight several precautions in the policies to be implemented. In this sense, all initiatives aimed at supporting development such as loans or net ODA assistance are considered fundamental, in these cases it is important to consider their ability to reduce the incidence of civil conflicts in African countries. These policies clearly need to be accompanied by increased monitoring of African regimes to ensure that they serve the interests of citizens.

Dealing with side effects such as increased militarization or even forced resettlement for the population should be reconsidered by both Chinese and Western aid models. For example, greater control of internal ethnic conflicts can help reduce the incidence of civil conflict in African countries as well, reducing the likelihood of civil or military conflict (Assefa, 2024).

3.5 Concluding remarks on effects and consequences of China-Africa relationship

Many academics criticize China's policies in Africa as, recognizing them as a form of neocolonialism. These criticisms refer to aspects such as China's control over the natural resources of these countries. The assistance mechanism whereby China provides loans and receives valuable resources in return is criticized precisely for its neocolonial approach.

Financial arrangements, investment strategies, the debt trap and unfair investment policies are all considered unfair policies for Africa's development. Policies that lead to greater economic and commercial dependence of the continent.

In addition, these economic advantages also lead to diplomatic and geostrategic benefits. By having greater control over the African economic system, the Chinese government can succeed in influencing domestic policies or otherwise ensuring the achievement of its specific interests.

China has been attacked by mainstream benefactors who have pointed out the Asian government's bad intentions in pursuing its own commercial and non-commercial interests. The fact that China has intervened in African regions with little stability and not very reliable institutions, has increased these accusations of Chinese neocolonialism.

Nevertheless, the Chinese government has always maintained a certain discretion in this regard, reiterating its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The goal is to create an economic and development situation for both parties, without considering many other variables around the issue.

China has intensively strengthened African infrastructure, leading to economic growth on the continent with a positive impact on the production of goods and services. This has happened even though there have been problems of governance and monitoring of institutions. All these initiatives have led the Chinese government to play a significant role on the global stage, managing to consolidate soft power, and its presence in the international community.

It is no coincidence that in 2022 Africa's main partner was China with its economic potential and a trade flow that covered over 282 billion dollars. If we consider total African imports, 16% came from China in 2018. Thanks to Chinese initiatives, twenty-five economic and trade cooperation zones have been created in sixteen different African countries, bringing a total investment of 7.35 billion dollars and ensuring a process of industrialization in various sectors such as natural resources, agriculture, manufacturing, trade and logistics.

In general, having experienced European colonialism directly, China has pursued its policies in Africa according to a different perspective than the West, implementing a less invasive approach to the internal political/social dynamics of the African continent. On the other hand, Western countries put many more stakes in their assistance policies, and this can distance many African governments from complying with western impositions (De Freitas, 2023).

From a geopolitical perspective, in recent years China has significantly expanded its political, economic, security and sociocultural influence in Africa, thus leading to important developments in international

relations. This situation further highlights the role of the African continent in the chessboard of international politics and in competition between states.

Within this international context, Chinese policies take on even more importance in terms of economic and political consequences. The Chinese approach in Africa aims to ensure multipolarity and the principle of non-interference, but at the same time does not hide the geopolitical interests of the Chinese government. China's strategy, focused on providing aid, cancelling debt and increasing trade between China and Africa, brings an effective situation to both the Chinese government and the African countries themselves.

However, it is important to note that the Chinese model does not reflect that of Western countries, as it aims at development and economic growth without considering democratic and human rights principles. Historically, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, many traditional players such as the USA and England have played a more marginal role on the continent, offering more opportunities for other players, including China. China's arrival in Africa has created a renewed East-West competition in the African system and this, according to academics, has brought more alternatives for African countries that can receive support in the development of their economy from new players. The diversification of international relations of African countries allows them to be more integrated at the global level without depending only on Western actors (Devecioglu, & Akçomak, 2024).

In addition, it is important to note that China's assistance policies in Africa also have some impact on political and security aspects. In this sense, the trade benefits between China and Africa can significantly influence geopolitical and sociocultural relations, through the establishment of military bases for commercial security, the organization of operations to bring peace, counterterrorism and the exchange of security equipment. Precisely for this reason, the policies of the Chinese government seem to follow a certain coherence and cohesion in pursuing both commercial advantages and geopolitical/strategic advantages.

As far as the economic aspect is concerned, the China-Africa economic relationship manifests itself in an uncertain way, especially considering the ever-increasing Chinese influence. Certainly, it is right to highlight the possibility for Africa to diversify its economic relations by having new partners such as China. However, there is still a certain uncertainty in China-Africa economic relations that is reflected in an asymmetrical relationship, like the historical relationship between the West and Africa. In the coming years, uncertainty will certainly decrease, especially if we consider all the Chinese investments in Africa, the production of value-added products and the sharing of technical knowledge and skills. It will therefore be seen whether this relationship will remain asymmetrical, or Africa will definitely succeed in reaching an important level of development (Ibid, 2024).

Although China's growth model is now well addressed, a possible change in economic relations between Africa and China has nevertheless been identified in 2024. The Chinese model has always relied on significant flows of financing and the enormous demand for raw materials that came from the African continent, especially in dynamics of mutual assistance. However, China has recently been thinking about implementing different policies due to economic variables such as the increasing aging population and the deceleration of the real

estate sector. This situation could lead to a sharp drop in Chinese demand for fossil fuels, thus also affecting economic relations with other countries (Chen, Fornino, & al, 2024).

China is slowing down its economic progression as it seems oriented towards creating an economic system based more on high-tech, with lower consumption and less exposure to possible geopolitical shocks (Usman, & Tang, 2024).

This economic transformation could also affect relations with Africa, particularly for oil-exporting and resource-intensive countries.

However, new economic opportunities will emerge in a different system that is not based only on natural resources. For example, the lowering of the age of the Chinese population could lead to structural problems in the Chinese labor market and excessive wage growth. In this economic context, China could look for alternatives to bridge this gap and could find one in Africa's abundant human capital that could become an asset. In this sense, appropriate political initiatives in Africa can change the continent's economic prospects.

Generally, a possible economic change or transition in China would have both beneficial and non-beneficial implications. As previously clarified, the relationship between China and Africa is constantly evolving and certainly depends largely on Chinese and global policies. In the event of significant changes, Africa will have to try to adapt through specific structural reforms. As a result, seeking new economic paths, increasing regional trade and having a competitive economic system will become the reforms to be pursued for Africa if a change in Chinese policies takes place (Chen, Fornino, & al, 2024).

CHAPTER 4

US-CHINESE GEOSTRATEGIC COMPETITION IN AFRICA: IS BIDEN'S POLICY A RESPONSE TO BEIJING'S INCREASING INFLUENCE IN THE CONTINENT?

The context of competition between great powers on the African continent is part of a long-lived period of political motivations and strategies, but above all it manifests in the transition from a unipolar order after the fall of the Soviet Union to an increasingly multipolar international arena. The changes of the Liberal International Order (LIO) have allowed several countries to emerge and to increase their growth potential. As a result, countries and regions such as China and East Africa have strengthened their role at the global level, but at the same time, they have begun to look more to their own interests at the expense of other global players such as the United States. This clearly influenced the domestic and foreign policies in all fields of the United States, which to safeguard its interests, had to adapt and relate to new actors and new challenges, especially on the African continent.

The presence of an alternative governance system led to a context of renewed interests in complicated social and economic situations but with potential expectations of growth in regions like the sub-Saharan area. All this manifests itself in a totally different contour of competition between the United States and China. According to scholar John Ikenberry, the United States has had to adapt to a global competition with an actor that has a very important economic and commercial potential.

As a matter of fact, China is considered a formidable competitor as a trading partner and political reference for US policy in Africa. In this global situation, rising states seek to position themselves in this new global order to develop and grow. China, for example, is one of the actors that in this case aims to improve its image and influence at a multipolar level, while sub-Saharan Africa is a region that needs greater security, development, and sustainability. Considering these interpretations, to have a clear view of the US response to China and its policies, it is important to first know the context in which the United States and China operate (Farmer, 2024).

4.1 Economic and Social Situation in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa

With average real GDP growth of 3.7% in 2024, higher than the global average of 3.2%, Africa maintains an extremely high growth rate among developing regions, lower only than that recorded in Asia.

Nevertheless, the 2024 reports confirm a downward trend in Africa in the indicator of average real gross domestic product (GDP) growth, which rose from 4.1 percent in 2022 to 3.1 percent in 2023. These data in reference to the macroeconomics of African countries have been influenced by many global factors, among

which they are identified: high food and energy prices mainly after the war in Ukraine, weak global demand affecting exports, climate change and extreme weather events and finally, political instability in some African countries. It is therefore noted that the growth of African countries is still closely linked to the events taking place within the region. In this sense, there is evidence of a degree of volatility in economic growth as the region still proves susceptible to entrenched structural challenges and economic/environmental shocks.

The loss of 1.0 percentage points compared to 4.1% in 2022 is explained by the pressure exerted by the energy and food sector, weak global demand weighing on export trends, the possible impacts of climate change, weather disasters and internal conflict situations.

In addition, this negative trend was also influenced by monetary policies on the continent, which promoted the reduction of inflation in an economic environment characterized by strongly depreciated exchange rates.

Generally, it is recorded that although economic growth has slowed across the continent, East Africa seems to be the most affected region. This is caused by the conflict in Sudan, which is also having important consequences on economic performance in the region. In fact, the index of real production contracted more than threefold to 37.5% in 2023, with a negative effect on the mining and energy sector particularly in South Sudan, which works on the extraction and processing of oil resources (African Development Bank, 2024).

The estimates forecast for 2024-25 report promising future data, with a modest assumption of economic growth in Africa. Essentially, some resilience and effectiveness of policies aimed at addressing climate impacts through Africa's average GDP growth was noted. To support this, 40 African countries show higher growth than in 2023 and according to the latest data, 15 countries will record a growth of 5% in 2024.

However, it is fair to point out that obstacles are still important not only in the economic development of the continent but also in bringing sustainable and social economic transformation. Although real GDP has been growing in recent years, it is noted that this is still not sufficient to cope with population growth.

In addition, real GDP per capita is still one of the lowest in the world. This figure is explained by a slow and irregular structural transformation, with economies of some African countries still required from the 90s. The greatest source of employment and growth is found in the traditional sectors, with a lack of industrialization of the continent that had to take place through structural transformation.

This process has led to a reallocation of economic activities and employment from agriculture to other relatively low-productivity sectors, such as personal and retail services, rather than higher manufacturing productivity. In addition, the productive performance of the agricultural sector that employs the most workforce, manifests itself with a productivity rate of less than 60% compared to the average productivity of the economy.

In addition, there is still a lack of investment in key sectors such as education, energy, productivity and infrastructure to achieve the long-awaited structural transformation and the same growth performance as the most developed countries.

Increasing fiscal resources and facilitating investment in the most critical private sectors are two of the solutions hypothesized to promote this structural transformation of Africa that is struggling to take off. Nevertheless, according to recent estimates, this cannot be enough. The international financial system should

ensure greater transparency and involvement in Africa, especially in the decision-making process of resource allocation. New reforms are needed to create a fairer, more inclusive and transparent system, thus making the necessary resources available on a large scale and under competitive conditions, rather than risking economic sluggishness for developing countries (Ibid, 2024). Deepening the regional context, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is an African region with great potential, just think of the rich natural resources it has, but at the same time it is a very irregular region, made up of low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high-income countries. 22 of the countries in the region are fragile or affected by conflict, and 13 states have a small population, limited human capital and a small territorial area.

Nevertheless, according to data on economic progress, the sub-Saharan area is in a negative trend, especially between 2022 and 2023. Political instability and violence together with negative climatic effects are important limits to the continent's growth process. Poverty continues to affect more than 462 million people, and the debt problem is still a growing problem.

Debt distress affects roughly 21 African countries that have a rate of high external debt distress. In this regard, Chad, Zambia and Ghana have promoted new practices to restructure debt and seek greater financial stability. In general, there is uneven growth across Africa: East Africa has a level of 1.8% in 2023, while West Africa has a level of 3.3%. Therefore, the growth of the sub-Saharan region is also strongly influenced by the lower performance of the continent's major countries. The document spots energy and transport problems for South Africa's growth and critical issues in the oil sector for Nigeria, which still maintains a growth rate that is still far too modest.

Finally, political and conflict situations in countries such as Sudan, Niger and Gabon are also underlined, which have repercussions on the growth performance of the economic and monetary Community of Central Africa and some Sahel nations.

The report also offers possible policies to analyse. It is thought that the use of natural resources can be fundamental to try to counter the debt problem and bring about a sort of financial rebalancing. Oil, gas and minerals are energy resources that can play a significant role in the "rich" area of sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, there are also the future benefits of population growth and more inclusive growth. The region will have increased human potential in the coming decades with a 740 million increase in the working-age population by 2050, a change that will happen faster than other regions on the continent. This process could create up to 12 million young people ready for the labour market each year in the coming decades, but with the potential to create only 3 million new jobs.

Considering the expected disparities in the pace of future economic growth between regions, according to the reports, it will be necessary to promote policies aimed at spreading benefits more equitably among the population, opting for economic diversification, investing in human capital and creating as many jobs as possible (World Bank, 2023).

Generally, within sub-Saharan Africa, there is a certain positive trend after difficult years. Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Kenya issued Eurobonds earlier this year and economic conditions appear to be more favourable, allowing

the region to expand its role in global markets. This was also supported by a more favourable and balanced public debt-to-GDP ratio than in previous years.

In line with the following claims, the region is experiencing a modest recovery in economic growth with a forecast of 3.8% in 2024 compared to 3.4% in 2023, forecasting to reach 4.0% by 2025. In addition, the median inflation rate also shows some improvement, with a level almost halved compared to the 10% recorded in 2022.

However, not everything seems to work perfectly. The biggest problem arises in the capacity and management of funding. Many countries in the region lack sufficient domestic resources for debt payments and the lack of financing together with the excessive costs pose limits to the economic growth of these countries, with important risks even of rollover. In years when debt repayments are expected, governments will be forced to implement austerity policies and shift development funds towards debt servicing, creating a possible slowdown in growth prospects for future generations.

This situation involves a reduction in traditional financing, especially in the field of official development assistance, leading governments to choose different financing with less transparency and shorter deadlines.

In addition, the region has a certain structural vulnerability to possible global shocks caused by geopolitical changes and possible climate upheavals. The sub-Saharan area is facing growing political instability and frequent climate shocks, with the problem of drought becoming increasingly severe and widespread (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

On a social level, according to the United Nations, 33 out of 46 underdeveloped countries are located in Africa within the sub-Saharan area, which is recognised as one of the regions with the greatest risks and underdevelopment. Almost half of the population of the area lives in poverty, 20% of the population faces chronic hunger, and about 60% lives in extreme poverty (on less than \$1.90 a day).

Most of the employment in the region, or 80%, is in the informal sector, but in undignified conditions and without any guaranteed protection at work. While 26% of young women and 16% of young men (aged 15-24) have no social involvement in the region: they do not work, study or attend training and child labour is considered a major scourge in the region, with child labour far exceeding that recorded in the rest of the world. Youth literacy is one of the lowest in the world. This is 72 percent, compared to 90 percent and 97 percent in the MENA countries and Latin America. The region also has the highest maternal mortality, with estimates that before Covid, 66% of all maternal deaths globally, occurred in SSA. Although there have been improvements, there is still a very critical social situation with institutions that are far too weak and democratic principles still lacking (Surender, 2023).

Finally, what emerges is the fact that Africa faces several complicated challenges. Although on average there has been modestly positive economic growth over the last decade, there are still many obstacles such as poverty, unemployment and income inequality that plague the African continent.

Corruption, low institutional performance, and political instability are factors that still make the African area weak both in the economic and political compartments. The exposure linked to these elements does not guarantee sustainable and transparent development towards African citizens.

In addition, the infrastructures are not yet capable of promoting and guaranteeing the economic and commercial development of the country. Transport, energy and telecommunications significantly affect possible economic growth and development, especially considering the continent's increasingly rapid demographic transition that will come with its new needs (De Freitas, 2023).

However, according to experts, the continent's climate vulnerability and the partial democracy loss are also two elements that should not be underestimated when analysing the African context.

For what concerns weather and climate events, these are factors with an impactful action on the continent. In 2023, there were more than 15,000 deaths in Africa due to very severe weather events, including floods, fires, and droughts.

The floods have hit the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda intensively, killing more than 3,000 people. Other floods caused by tropical cyclone Freddy in February caused the number of victims to rise, with 860 deaths in several African countries. In addition, more than 29 million people in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, Mauritania, Niger and Madagascar have been affected by drought.

Although Africa is not primarily responsible for recent climate change, it is suffering the consequences more than other parts of the world. This becomes relevant also considering the damage to the continent's infrastructure and health facilities that have been created with investment and aid.

Precisely for this reason, in recent years, local leaders and the community have highlighted the need to finance and invest but in a sustainable way with long-term projects that consider the adaptation and mitigation of climate events. In this sense, in 2023 the African Climate Week (ACW) and the Africa Climate Summit (ACS) were held in Kenya, events in which African leaders reiterated the effort of these countries to promote policies in the field of renewable energy, sustainable land use and innovative climate technologies (Wilson Center Africa Program, 2024).

For what concerns the democracy principles and the respect of human rights, on the continent a declining trend was recently identified. The data collected by the V-Dem project showed that democratic principles have been questioned much more on the African continent than in the rest of the world in the most recent period. It is no coincidence that African countries with an autocratic political system exceeded the 5% quota recorded in 2008, reaching 30% in 2020. On the contrary, countries with a democratic system have gone from 20% in 2014 to 7% in 2020. These figures underscore the presence of increasingly autocratic political systems in Africa, with even worse estimates in 2023 as autocratic governments ruled half of the continent's population, while only 7% were ruled by more democratic countries.

North Africa, the Sahel and West Africa are identified as the areas most affected by the autocratic trend with average estimates of electoral democracy of 0.34 in Central and Eastern Africa, 0.29 in the Sahel and 0.28 in North Africa compared to the 0-1 scale.

While the 2023 data indicate that the west and south are the areas of the continent with a more democratic index.

Overall, between 2013 and 2023, 17 African countries recorded an increase in electoral democracy, while the opposite trend was found in 37 countries. Burkina Faso, for example, suffered a drop by 0.4 in the democratic score, flanked by Libya with a (-0.35), Tunisia (-0.29), Mauritius (-0.27), Niger (-0.24) and Comoros (-0.23). The events that led to this situation were identified mainly in violent political actions like coups d'état, such as in Burkina Faso in 2022 or as well as the July 2023 coup d'état in Niger. A similar situation also applies to Libya, which has been facing a civil war for a long time now, and in the Comoros, where corruption and bad governance have led to a significant democratic deterioration (China & Bartos, 2024).

4.2 Geostrategic competition: two competitive development models

The theme of competition between the USA and China is increasingly recurring in international debates concerning Africa. This is also confirmed by the discussions of the US Congress that underline the importance of evaluating foreign assistance in relation to Chinese activities on the continent. An attempt is being made to understand whether US policies are adequate to promote its interests compared to the so-called competitors present on the African continent. In addition, members of Congress also seem to express some concern about the African perception of the US and China, considering broader Chinese support, especially in high-profile infrastructure in the region. In this vein, U.S. officials are trying to understand whether American foreign assistance is capable of countering Chinese presence defined as "malignant" in Africa. Precisely for these reasons, in examining the allocation of aid necessary for the 2024 fiscal year, the Congress will also consider the aspect of strategic competition in Africa and evaluate the effectiveness of countering programs such as Countering Strategic Competitors (CSC) in the region (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

The rivalry between the United States and China is a constant factor in geopolitical competition in Africa. According to Qasim (2023), China is considered as a formidable player that, thanks to its initiatives such as the BRI, has managed to expand its sphere of influence in the continent. Chinese infrastructure projects and investments have increased China's economic and diplomatic dominance in Africa. On the other hand, the United States is described as an actor that seeks to oppose this growing Chinese dominance by recognizing China as a major danger to American interests.

US initiatives such as military partnerships, the Prosper Africa plan, and recent efforts such as the \$55 billion plan for Africa are part of this strategy, seeking to counterbalance China's economic influence and safeguard geopolitical interests. In such a context, Africa represents the fertile territory for geopolitical competition between the two nations.

The Biden administration manifests this need to compete with China in official documents through the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, which highlight the issue of geopolitical competition between great powers (ISPI, 2023).

In the official documents, therefore, the propensity to consider China capable of influencing the global order with its economic, technological, and military powers emerges.

The basis of this competition relies on the vision of the world that these countries express, including completely different values, norms and standards. For this reason, the United States manifest its willingness to compete with China to maintain interests and an international structure that follows its values.

This perspective leads the United States to create diplomatic alliances, to invest in foreign assistance, to strengthen its technological/industrial commitment and to consider the military aspect as well (White House, 2022). According to Runde (2020), US foreign assistance today needs to be adapted to new challenges and situations of a changed international context. US policies maintain their purpose and their potential, but this implies also to face the Chinese challenge. On the other hand, China is characterized by an important dominance in many Third World countries.

Many academics define the current competition between the two countries as similar to that during the Cold War. However, China should not be underestimated as a strategic player, as its ability to offer a valuable economic and development alternative compared to the Soviet model is an element to be considered in the analysis.

Chinese policy in this case offers many incentives to the receiving African countries, encouraging them to collaborate in the name of a mutually beneficial collaboration. This rhetoric allows China to be considered a better option than others, as well as a more attractive player globally. All this is linked to China and its policy of national sovereignty, affirming a sort of aversion to Western policies of intervention in the internal affairs of African states and considering it not legitimate.

On the other hand, Western actors such as the United States have not shared this rhetoric of respect for sovereignty, providing aid but in a more conditional way, i.e. imposing limits to be respected. This has certainly brought China closer to African governments, but also favouring those more authoritarian governments or so-called hybrid regimes in which corruption and phenomena such as the clientelism of the political system are manifested (Tull, 2006).

The support of African countries is also a significant diplomatic element for both Beijing and Washington on all issues at the global level. In case there is not the same thought on an issue, there is an attempt by both states to gain as much support as possible at the international level.

The opposition between the two models of development is based precisely on an ideological divergence. China puts development above democracy and all those values supported by the West. While the United States promotes a development model in the name of freedom, the rule of law, democratic values and sustainability (Wang, 2020).

Moreover, the US model has a much higher degree of transparency in defining and classifying its aid plans than the Chinese model.

In the Chinese aid system, there is a lack of institutionalization and greater bureaucratization. So much so that clearly deciphering the Chinese model remains a complicated matter. In addition, Beijing maintained a certain confidentiality until 2011 by not making public official reports on foreign assistance. Chinese aid plans were considered by the government itself as “classified material”, and this policy was due to fear on the part of the domestic government that it had to deal with negative public perception. Fear of an internal reaction from

Chinese citizens and competition for more aid from recipient countries have influenced the government to maintain some confidentiality on aid data.

However, this opacity also reflects the role that foreign aid plays in terms of foreign policy objectives and motivation, while also complicating the classification of Chinese aid plans that could instead be trade agreements (Tull, 2006).

All these differences represent a defined competition between two different development models that are aimed at reaching the respective goals and the values of different societies. Two divergent models of development, but more in general, an opposition of values and interests characterises the competition between the US and China (Wang, 2020).

4.2.1 Competition for minerals and natural resources

One of the issues that emerges particularly in the discussions of Congress is precisely the need for the supply of critical minerals for the United States, a need that has a major impact on the country's economy and security. However, cobalt, graphite, and manganese are all resources that are not readily available to the United States, which is forced to rely on imports from other countries.

According to experts, the global demand for these resources is taking on a major surge for all the most industrialized countries. These considerations have been formulated in line with the perspective of a more sustainable economic transition, which requires precisely the supply of raw materials such as cobalt and graphite, considered as alternatives to fuels and other polluting substances.

As a matter of fact, scientists consider these materials essential for batteries and low-consumption electronics, for high-intensity medical instruments and high-performance engines for both war and defensive use.

So, while political leaders can still manage this economic transition by changing its trajectory, it now seems inevitable that critical minerals will be a critical resource in the future, as world economies become increasingly dependent on these resources. It therefore becomes necessary for countries such as the United States to diversify their economy and their sources of supply to remain competitive in the market and not rely exclusively on other countries such as China, which in the end are real global competitors (United States Institute of Peace, 2024).

In this context, Africa is a key continent, as it represents an area capable of providing many natural resources in the commercial and military fields.

And being a major exporter of gas and oil, the United States looks at Africa with great interest. In fact, the United States relies on Africa for a significant number of raw materials for economic and national security purposes.

In addition to critical mineral for the economic transition, Africa can also supply the US with minerals for national defence, such as platinum; Iridium (for electronics, including aircraft engines and satellites); tantalum (for jet engines, missiles and global positioning systems); and tourmaline (for aerospace and ballistic

purposes). However, it is fair to specify that according to experts, China also has the same need, and it is certainly not waiting for other competitors (Ibid, 2024).

It is no coincidence that the official congressional report specifically mentions the problem of critical minerals. In this case, reference is made to China's dominance over global supply chains of "critical minerals" that pose major problems for the American economy and security. China is identified as one of the most important countries in the export of raw minerals and capable of processing and reselling them in the global market.

Many US political officials are concerned about China's key role in the DRC's cobalt industry. A dominant position that in 2022 China held for 70% of total production globally. Among other things, the Biden administration itself has included cobalt in the list of critical minerals, as it is essential for the construction of electric car batteries and for other industrial purposes. Concerns also remain significant about the Republic of Congo's lithium reserves and copper in Zambia (Congressional research service, 2023).

In such a context, experts consider competition in the field of critical resources as a crucial element at the global level. The United States, its allies and the private sector could counter Chinese policies, bringing an alternative to the Chinese approach that has no consideration for local value, corruption or human rights violations.

However, academics are agreeing on the fact that although the Biden administration and Congress are giving some priority to the inclusion of US companies in the African mineral resources markets, China and other competitors are continuing to strengthen their initiatives in this area. In addition, forecasts underline an expansion of the market with not only China but also the Gulf States and other countries that seem to be showing great interest in Africa and its mining market. For this reason, if the United States intends to defend its national and economic interests, it is certainly obliged to intensify its initiatives on the African continent as well (United States Institute of Peace, 2024).

4.2.2 The importance of technology on a global scale

Today, the technology sector has also taken on a certain importance on the geopolitical scene. Technologies and the transition defined as the fourth industrial revolution opens a scenario of opportunities but at the same time of risks for relations between the United States and Africa. The prospect of technological advancement will be reflected in the industrial sector with the use of new technologies necessary to improve industrial production efficiency but also in finance, banking services, infrastructure and construction development, agriculture and agro-industry, tourism and creative industries, information and communication technologies, sustainability, education, energy and health care. In addition, technological advancement will also be a powerful means of expanding democracy, good governance, access to services, inclusion and sustainable development of society. For this reason, a country capable of managing these innovations can guarantee the recognition of a certain leadership at a global level that should be accompanied by policies that promote

technological advancement but at the same time, also address the risks associated with for example cyberattacks.

In this context, the United States should become aware of the technological changes in Africa also considering China's strategic dominance on the continent. The possibility for the United States to become a key player in the technology sector in Africa would provide a significant geopolitical advantage in the geostrategic competition (Signé, 2022).

In the congressional report, information and communication technologies (ICT) and "digital authoritarianism" are also cited as important elements to consider in the geostrategic confrontation. It has been found that Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE are investing massively in economic support and in the creation of ICT infrastructures of many African countries, especially in 5G wireless, and government cloud infrastructure systems. The Chinese government is managing to secure its dominance in Africa in the telephony sector thanks also to its companies that invest in "smart city" projects, which are born with the intention of using technology to improve state services, but often, they are real state surveillance systems with the use of artificial intelligence. Clearly, members of Congress are concerned about this situation, especially considering all the privacy risks and the use of these Chinese technologies to favour authoritarian regimes on the continent.

Also, not to be underestimated are the risks for American companies and government assets in Africa that can be easily compromised by unethical technological activities (Congressional research service, 2023).

4.2.3 Soft power: Africa's vision of the USA in terms of global leadership

When it comes to soft power and global leadership of the United States in Africa, there is a context of confrontation between many players trying to gain influence on the continent. China as well as other players are trying to cultivate increasingly stable ties with the continent, thus strengthening its influence and dominance at the global level.

The increasingly concrete progress of competitors should worry the United States, which has lost part of its dominance in Africa compared to the past, without neglecting the potential of soft power.

China has established its leadership by carrying out development projects worth \$75 billion in recent decades between 2000 and 2011, and in 2009, China became Africa's top trading partner, beating off competition from the United States. It is no coincidence that it is claimed that Chinese aid has injected a lot of capital into the African economy and has created the infrastructure necessary for the development of the African continent. In this context, trade diplomacy and China's assistance model play a key role in influencing global politics by weakening American leadership.

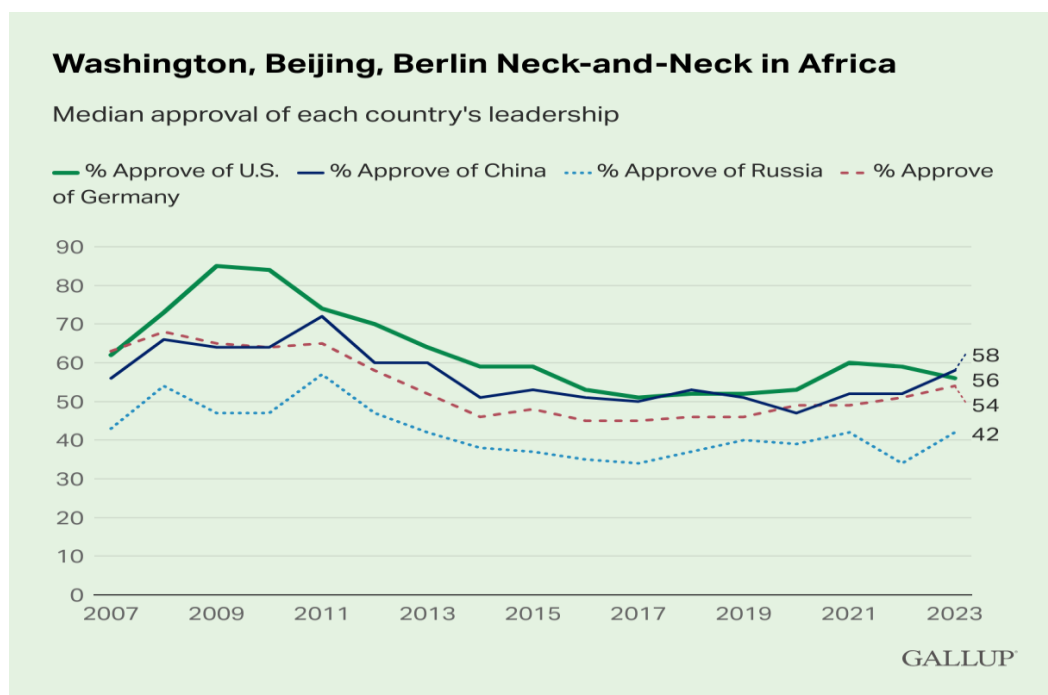
In this regard, Chinese assistance practices are recognized as potential soft power activities such as educational and cultural exchanges, and political party training programs. All this, accompanied by China's growing dominance also in information and technology in Africa. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton herself, considering the growing Chinese media presence in Africa, had spoken of information warfare and concrete risks for the

United States. It is no coincidence that already in 2016, according to the Afrobarometer, the indicator of Africans in favour of Chinese foreign assistance policies was increasing significantly, with three out of five African regions in which the popularity of the US development model was equalled or even surpassed (Harris, 2017).

Even more concrete data emerged in recent years. According to the Gallup analysis, the United States is significantly losing influence in Africa and on the contrary, China is advancing significantly.

The report shows that the average approval rating for the US, which indicatively represents soft power, has fallen from 59% in 2022 to 56% in 2023. Taking into consideration four of the main countries in Africa, it is found that the United States has suffered a deterioration in its image throughout Africa in 2023, the only one not to see its image improved throughout Africa in 2023. In contrast, China has improved its perception in the region from 52% in 2022 to 58% in 2023, two points higher than the United States.

In the recent period, the average approval rating in the United States has slowed down mainly in Uganda (-29 points), Gambia (-21 points) and Kenya (-14 points). Even in Libya and Somalia, there have been more negative opinions than in the past on the leadership of the United States.



As can be seen from the graph since 2007, the United States could count on a higher average approval rating in Africa than China, having a significant advantage until 2016. Only from 2017 to 2019 a rating tie can be noted between the two states. However, in 2023, China managed to overtake the United States, starting a positive trend. This figure, if considered in today's context of geostrategic competition, has its relevance on all fronts, both economic and diplomatic (Gallup, 2024).

Historians partly explain these figures by the fact that the U.S. tends to follow its own policies in Africa while pushing for conditions to be respected, such as respect for human rights and good governance. These "stakes" in granting aid obviously in some cases do not attract many African countries that prefer the less constrained Chinese approach. In addition, it should also be considered that many policies of the American past have led some African countries to think that these conditions often follow double standards, i.e. they do not always apply but depend very much on the interests of the US government. The United States' own remarks to Africa about not collaborating with China have triggered a negative view in Africa that would like to be increasingly independent in taking its own choices.

As Biden himself has often pointed out, Africa expects a more equal and collaborative approach than in the past, otherwise African states will be reluctant to cooperate with the US (Viswanathan & Purushothaman, 2014).

4.2.4 Economic competition and risks for the US

According to experts, Africa's potential population increase could bring significant benefits to American businesses and Africa's increased consumption of American goods and services could positively influence the U.S. economy.

It is expected that by 2050 there will be a quarter of the world's population only in the sub-Saharan area, with a significant number of Africans to be included as a workforce in the world economy. In addition, by 2025, 90 million African households are expected to be potential consumers with \$2.1 trillion in purchasing power.

The African economy is increasingly influential globally. Even though the continent makes up only about 3% of global GDP, the annual growth rate of real GDP is growing by 4.4%, imposing itself globally.

These considerations place Africa as one of the most important emerging regions, with a significant potential consumer market. Many of these economic benefits will depend on the ability of the United States to take advantage of them (Harris, 2017).

Beijing, for example, is very active in Africa and has far surpassed the United States in investment. 50 billion dollars per year are the revenues that Chinese infrastructure projects bring to Beijing's economy, significantly affecting the labor market and Chinese and African economic development (Jacobs, 2017).

On the contrary, the United States does not seem to be consistently involved in the African context, risking losing fundamental benefits from the region.

Due to the economic risks associated with investments, there are not many US companies in the African territory, and this means that Chinese companies are more likely to invest (EY's Africa Attractiveness Survey, 2016).

For this reason, the importance of acting as soon as possible for the United States is emphasized. In this sense, the US government has the interest of counterbalancing Chinese strength, facilitating the entry of its companies

into the region. Engaging the private sector and at the same time, exploiting an emerging market is a vital issue in the context of geostrategic competition

In addition, creating trade ties can represent a potential means of increasing a country's political value. Not adequately exploiting the economy and opportunities means that the competitors will seize the opportunity, increasing their relations and political influence with the continent. The risk is not only losing economic opportunities, but also it is referring to the image of global leadership, a key element to guarantee interests in the competition between global powers (Harris, 2017).

Overall, strengthening trade, investment and technology in Africa represents a unique opportunity for the countries involved on the continent. An adequate development model and economic growth policy can benefit both the United States and Africa. And precisely because America is behind its competitors, it needs to fill the gap with China (Singé, 2021).

4.2.5 The security and military competition

Geostrategic competition has also been projected at the military level. The desire to acquire greater geopolitical and strategic relevance has prevailed in the political dynamics between the US and China, which seem increasingly preoccupied with the initiatives carried out by each other. In the sub-Saharan area, this element has been a constant dynamic, with the United States very attentive to Chinese initiatives and vice versa.

Each country has different interests and capabilities in Africa, and actions are influenced by US and China strategies in the region.

China seeks to secure and maintain access to resources and markets, and to safeguard its citizens and businesses abroad (Murphy, 2023).

In terms of military involvement and security, China poses significant risks to the US. In fact, according to Congress, the Chinese government is one of the main sponsors and suppliers of arms on the African continent. In addition, since 2008, it has also participated in anti-piracy initiatives in the Horn of Africa, and it is considered as a major contributor to UN peace operations (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

The strategies, however, are clearly different. On the one hand, China seeks to impose itself with the aim of safeguarding its supply of resources and markets on the continent, on the other hand, the United States, after losing influence, wants to regain power and at the same time, safeguard its own interests on the continent.

Currently, China has managed to set up a base in Djibouti. But the risk of other military bases is high, especially in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Namibia, Seychelles and Tanzania. The United States seems to have greater control with a base in Djibouti, Niger, and it is very active in Kenya and Somalia, and in other areas of the sub-Saharan area (Murphy, 2023).

However, one of the issues that worries competitors such as the US, is Chinese increase in military diplomacy. Strategies such as military exercises, and high-level activities that are carried out on African territory. Among these, the problematic role of military basing is highlighted, which is increasingly sponsored by the Asian

power. An example is the creation of the military base in Djibouti in 2017, which has also raised many concerns by the AFRICOM.

Concern also shared by the US Department of Defense, which has highlighted the strategic and security danger in China's attempt to expand the establishment of military facilities in Africa.

This element was later reiterated by AFRICOM commander Langley, underlining the risk for the United States of being disadvantaged compared to China in geostrategic dynamics. It is no coincidence that starting from 2022, Equatorial Guinea has been a diplomatic target of the United States, i.e. an attempt has been made to influence relations between the African countries and China to avoid the creation of a naval base in those territories (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

However, Chinese involvement in other vital areas can also be considered a danger to the United States. The expansion of Chinese bases in more vital regions is a significant issue to the interests of the United States and its allies and partners. For example, there is a lot of preoccupation about having Chinese bases on the west and east coast of Africa that would respectively guarantee naval access to the Atlantic and greater control over maritime lines of communication (SLOC).

It is therefore clear that with respect to this fact, the US government should shape its policy according to these geostrategic changes. The growing militarization and naval bases are of great concern to U.S. officials.

However, there is not only concern about military bases, but China's ability to enter into military or cooperation agreements can certainly play a significant role in the fight for influence between the US and China (Murphy, 2023).

The US-China competitive framework should not exclude the fact that many of the global challenges, including climate change, food security, the fight against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, are global issues that require common and, in some cases, even cooperative approaches (ISPI, 2023).

4.3 The recent US strategy as a response to Chinese influence in Africa

According to academics, the rivalry between the United States and China in the African context is a significant constant in analyses concerning the continent and its development. It is precisely this consideration that leads many academics to think that the growing Chinese presence on the continent is now a significant factor within American policies aimed at Africa, even though this is not always declared as the main concern by American political leaders. The 2022 USA-Africa Summit that promoted the U.S. Investment Plan for Africa included many important elements such as food security, global health, education, and the U.S. partnership with Africa in its discussions. However, the rivalry with China in Africa has not disappeared in political discussions, but rather played an important role in private conversations. It is no coincidence that Teodoro Obiang, an autocrat from Equatorial Guinea who is promoting China's attempt to build a naval base in the country, was invited to the Summit. In this specific case, although the US favors democracy in Africa as its goal, it went against this

principle by inviting the African dictator to the US-Africa Summit for purely geostrategic concerns, thus underlining the influence that China can have on American actions aimed at Africa.

According to this logic, academics argue that in many cases the United States looks with a special eye on China's political moves without paying attention to its own policies. In the last two decades, the United States is thought to be very focused on the Chinese presence in Africa, even in a way that is often too exaggerated to the point of completely distorting its policy on the continent and making it less effective. Rory Truex, an associate professor at Princeton University, underlined a chronic case of Chinese anxiety by American administrations, stating that "Almost everything that has the word 'Chinese' in front of it now triggers a fear response in our political system, confusing our ability to properly assess and contextualize threats" (Ray, 2024).

This excessive strategic focus on China is also spotted by other experts who interpreted the launch of the Biden administration's \$55 million support plan as the United States' desire to strengthen its political and economic influence on the continent but at the same time as an intention of the US government to respond to a long and entrenched Chinese presence on the continent (ISPI, 2024).

A New York Times article highlighted President Biden's attempt to try to increase American engagement in Africa that until recent period had been underestimated. Implementing political and economic initiatives to remedy the negligence of the past, but above all to make up ground on competitors such as China, who have now significantly expanded their influence on the continent.

This delay compared to China is considered as one of the main causes that prompted the administration to try to make up for some of the delay. Geopolitical competition with China is considered fundamental, but not only that, the latter has expanded even more by bringing other competitors to the continent such as Russia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (New York Times, 2022).

The Biden administration shows its willingness to recover some dominance considering that China has an advantage especially in foreign investment to the continent and many African countries have shown themselves to be of different positions even with respect to the war in Ukraine (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

The initiatives promoted have certainly proposed an important assistance model for Africa which, as mentioned in the previous chapters, promises the formation of a continental free trade area but also a transition of the system towards a more sustainable economy and a well-defined digitalisation. A model that differs from China and its infrastructural policies.

However, it is also crucial to note that although there is a common thesis in considering recent American policies as a sort of response to the Chinese model, the intention of the Biden government is not to focus its policies on the concept of competition and rivalry with China. According to official statements, this perception of Africa as a territory of contrast between two superpowers is not desired by the current administration.

Indeed, although some of the current administration's diplomatic initiatives have advocated democratization in Africa as a counterpoint to the Chinese model, U.S. officials have emphasized that assistance policies as well as the U.S.-Africa Summit that launched the \$55 million program were not based solely on the issue of China's presence in Africa, avoiding the risk of a predatory policy (Ibid, 2022).

The idea that the U.S. is heavily influenced by China in its assistance policies is also manifested in recent congressional reports on U.S. assistance policies to Africa where China, and the dangers associated with it, are mentioned.

In the congressional report, the People's Republic of China is cited as a very influential player in sub-Saharan African countries. Clearly, this relationship between China and Africa can already be traced back to the Cold War period, but in the recent period it has grown exponentially with the launch in 2000 of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This is underlined as several members of Congress are already expressing some concern regarding China's geostrategic policies and objectives in Africa. Chinese initiatives are seen as a threat to U.S. foreign policy and national security interests.

The current government has already shown the presence of strategic competition with the PRC in terms of national and regional security. It is no coincidence that Chinese policies have been described as destabilizing by the US Secretary of Defense. As noted by the Congress, the PRC has established significant trade, financial and investment ties in Africa and has managed to receive more and more international support in its foreign policies.

The sub-Saharan region is profitably exploited by China, which obtains raw materials such as minerals critical to its industrial and manufacturing livelihood. There is a significant presence of PRC companies in Africa, especially in the infrastructure field, and Chinese commercial activities are strongly supported by the credit provided by the Chinese state in the territory. In addition, the debt problem is also cited as a critical situation created by loans without major conditionalities offered by China.

In many cases, African governments are attracted by the economic interests (export growth, capital and access to cheap goods), and geopolitical interests (as a preference for some PRC policies over several international partnerships) that are guaranteed by China (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

These elements were all expressed with concern in the congressional report on the assistance plan for the sub-Saharan area. But the report also states that it intends to confront the policies of the PRC, which now considers Africa "as an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order, promote its narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, undermine transparency and openness, and weaken the United States' relations with African peoples and governments."

The American model of assistance is therefore established in Africa as a possible alternative model of growth. However, it is specified that African countries will not be forced to choose between the PRC and the United States, setting these policies on a line that is not predatory but of greater respect for the sovereignty and independence of African countries that will be able to follow their own idea of development.

In the final part, Congress confirms a certain response to the growing ties between China and Africa, defining a series of means to provide foreign assistance with the aim of safeguarding the interests of the United States on the African continent. According to this logic, the United States' International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and the PRC Influence Fund (CPIF) of the United States are cited. In addition, during discussions in Congress, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2024 was established to conduct greater monitoring of the PRC's activities in Africa. What is clear to U.S. officials is that the expansion

of Chinese dominance on the continent could endanger both American commercial and security interests, so according to congress, it becomes important to consider responses to this geopolitical situation as well (Congressional Research Service, 2023). In general, despite the various official statements, academics express the idea that the US intends to relate to the African continent with the main aim of containing Beijing's initiatives, also underlining the importance for the US to establish projects for maritime security and countering terrorist actions (ISPI, 2024).

4.4 Why some of the Biden administration's choices in Africa could be explained as reactions to China: the cases of Equatorial Guinea and Congo

The Biden administration seemed to have brought back a greater focus on democracy that could lead to the idea that the relationship between the United States and many authoritarian countries could be greatly limited. This is also compared to Trump's previous policy, which seemed to give more space to autocratic leaders and little concern for respect for democracy and its principles (Carothers & Feldman, 2023). This feature was even more emphasized by President Biden during the 2021 Munich Security Conference. On this occasion, the president highlighted the global clash between democracies and autocracies, putting the United States as the guarantor of democracy (White House, 2021).

At the same time, Secretary of State Antony Blinken himself made it clear that foreign policy under the Biden administration would be aimed at defending democracy and human rights (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Biden's policy stance, therefore, initially followed a much tougher trajectory towards autocrats.

Nevertheless, in the following years, the initial approach to autocratic governments does not seem to have completely maintained the premises. According to analysts, overall, foreign policy has changed little compared to the Trump years but also compared to previous cooperative relations between the US and autocratic governments.

Thus, a division continues to emerge between collaborative relations between the United States and autocratic countries and a series of cold or conflictual relations with other countries.

This situation of division has clearly been influenced by the global geostrategic competition between the US and China, which has shaped the relational dynamics with other allied and non-allied states as well.

Similar to the Cold War, the geostrategic context leads the United States to compete with its main competitors, defending democratic principles but at the same time, making agreements with non-democratic leaders and governments that are willing to collaborate and support the United States (Carothers & Feldman, 2023).

In respect to these observations, one of the main aspects to take in consideration when analysing the US assistance model is related to the constraints and conditionalities applied to aid allocation. Western actors such as the USA chose to grant aid with the condition of respecting Western political standards and values such as, for example, the safeguard of human rights, labour standards and democracy principles (Tull, 2006).

In fact, within the US congressional report, it was manifested the likelihood of applying restrictions in terms of aid allocation to some countries that do not follow the requirements of the US government. It is directed to African countries with specific restrictions and to restrictions that can be applied to any country that does not comply with conditions related to governance, human rights and other issues (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

In this perspective, this differs from the Chinese model, which follows different political and strategic standards compared to US aid policy. China considers aid as not politically bound for African countries; in fact, it does not impose specific conditions to be respected (Tull, 2006).

According to Wang (2020), US government is worried about this Chinese policy aimed at promoting its own development model at the expense of the American one and, at the same time, trying to spread an ideology far from democratic values.

And this ideological diversification can also be found in the principles maintained by the two countries. While China is very attentive to issues of sovereignty and non-interference in its model, the US does not respect so-called inviolable sovereign rights in the event that individual freedom is not guaranteed, even resorting to invasive actions such as armed interventions.

However, it is interesting to note that in some specific cases, there are some critical issues in the conditions imposed by the US in favour of increasing competition with China or other players in Africa.

According to Carothers and Feldman (2023), in some situations the United States has given up on maintaining the conditions of its assistance policy, cooperating with autocratic countries with the intention of moving these countries away from Chinese domination or more specifically, for security issues and strategies related to the Asian government. As evidence of this situation, the significant interest of US officials in Gabon in 2023 is mentioned by the authors.

Despite democratic criticalities in local governance, the US administration maintained cooperative relations with the local government for reasons certainly related to mineral resources such as manganese, but above all to also cope with China's economic and strategic initiatives.

One of the most interesting cases, however, is the one between the USA and Equatorial Guinea. Considering the poor relations between the two countries in previous years, the Biden administration has tried to take back relations with the African country, without considering the political situation in the territory. This is considered by the analysts as an attempt to convince the country to stay away from China and more specifically not allow the construction and the use of a Chinese-sponsored naval base on the African territory (Carothers & Feldman, 2023).

This rapprochement was viewed in opposition to the conditions of democracies and human rights mentioned above, but also in stark contrast with the cardinal principles of the 2022 US-Africa summit, which laid the main foundations for the policy of assistance in Africa. As a matter of fact, the invitation of dictator Teodoro Obiang to the Summit, was not without criticism from political analysts. There has been much opposition to this initiative, pointing out that the strong commitment of the United States to guarantee respect for democratic

principles and human rights has failed. This has led to criticism of the administration's commitment to democracy and human rights (Ray, 2024).

The “foreign policy” magazine in one of its articles, has further emphasized this aspect by highlighting the visit made by some US officials of the Biden administration to Equatorial Guinea with the task of strengthening relations with the African autocrat and distancing the Guinean government from Chinese initiatives. According to the article, this meeting took place before the invitation to the US-Africa Summit in order to prepare the ground for negotiation and collaboration between the two countries.

Human rights advocates argued that this policy of U.S. cooperation with Obiang is in opposition with its core principles, paying no attention to the corruption and gross human rights violations that have taken place under the autocrat.

Criticism also came from Tutu Alicante, executive director of EG Justice, a non-profit organization focused on human rights and democracy in Equatorial Guinea, that described Obiang as an autocrat capable of using China's presence to ensure that the US does not oppose his questionable policies in the country.

The Biden administration's involvement with Obiang is part of a partially contradictory context, i.e. a foreign and assistance policy that, in order to counterbalance Chinese dominance, is willing not to put democracy and human rights in the first place (Gramer, Mackinnon & al, 2022).

In addition to the political aspect itself, it is important to note that Equatorial Guinea has strategic potential also thanks to the oil fields of its territory. Guaranteeing the possible use of these resources to American companies has partly influenced the tolerant collaboration of the United States with a government that does not respect democratic principles.

It is precisely this final perspective that proves to be very relevant in the light of the considerations mentioned in the previous paragraph on geostrategic competition for mineral resources.

The rivalry between the US and China in grabbing as many resources as possible becomes a fundamental element for the next analysis as well.

Within the US government rhetoric, cooperative relations can be established for economic reasons. It is precisely this interest in mineral and critical resources that manifests an attempt to strengthen one's own economy, but at the same time also implies taking resources that competitors can no longer use, such as China. This logic can lead the U.S. to have a significant interest in resources like oil, natural gas, and critical minerals such as lithium that considerations of democracy, transparency, or labor standards take a back seat.

The case of Congo in this context becomes emblematic for better understanding these dynamics (Carothers & Feldman, 2023).

This African country, in fact, has huge cobalt and copper resources to produce lithium-ion batteries.

However, the Chinese government has managed to grab a large part of these resources that are exported to China, resulting in an enforcement of Chinese dominance in the field of critical resources.

For this reason, the Biden administration is increasingly committed to ensuring support for countries like Congo in all stages of extraction and processing of critical materials.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken himself, after the ratification of the agreement with Congo on critical minerals, defined this as a step towards the future for the African country and the United States itself (Skibell, 2023).

The agreement between the two countries does not directly refer to China, but it is considered particularly important in terms of competition with China. In addition, the advantages would also concern the American domestic market with possible new collaborations between vehicle manufacturers.

In this perspective, it is worth emphasising the relevance of the economic transition process that is expected at a global level. The Biden administration, like other governments, is aiming at increasing the use of electric vehicles and at creating a diversified market. Consequently, a collaboration in this field becomes a key element on the global scale. Without underestimating, that, many experts point to a future scenario in which the scarcity of critical resources will increase, leading to even more heated competition.

Nevertheless, there are criticisms also in this case. In the cobalt sector, in fact, several problems have been reported in relation to labor standards and respect for workers' rights. Several bodies such as Amnesty International and the US Department of Labour itself have highlighted these problems, mentioning human rights violations, such as forced child labor.

Many analysts in this case have criticized the strong support for the cobalt project from the United States, even though the administration is aware of the abuses in the cobalt mining sector (Ibid, 2023).

So, in conclusion, this observation confirms the initial argument, according to which the U.S. government's interest in resources such as oil, natural gas, and critical minerals is so important that elements like democracy or labor standards can be neglected (Carothers & Feldman, 2023).

CONCLUSION

According to the reviewed literature, development assistance can be considered a practice with a significant value, as it implies an important political potential for donor countries. In this sense, it can be said that strengthening political involvement can be spotted behind the logic of aid.

This logic has been a constant and dominant theme in the justifications for development assistance. For example, the Marshall Plan, was described as a strategic tool, used to avoid external aggression by the Soviet Union and to pursue political interests of western countries during the Cold war.

Through aid, it is possible to influence internal and foreign affairs of other states. As a matter of fact, it was revealed that U.S. leaders and policymakers consider foreign assistance as an "essential tool of their country's foreign policy," interrelated with US national security interests.

Historically, many analysts have called U.S. support for Africa episodic as goals and strategies have evolved along the way. In many cases, Africa has never been seen as strategically important.

In 2022, during the summit of African Heads of State, the Biden-Harris administration announced the implementation of foreign assistance plan for the African continent. The US President Biden manifested its commitment to building the future of Africa, signalling a change of tone compared to the Trump administration.

Generally analysing the evolution and transformations in US assistance policy, it emerged that Biden tried to change the approach to African policy, replacing Trump's vision based on US benefits with the expectation of an equal US-Africa partnership.

Compared to the policies of previous administrations, the idea of elevating the partnership between the United States and Africa is positioned as a novelty in American policy towards Africa. As a different way of managing relations with Africa and its leaders.

However, it is worth noting that that Biden's African strategy has been subject to criticism by academics. It was accused of not being totally effective, the strategy and the objectives to be followed are well-defined, but there is little indication on how to promote democracy or deter and reverse coups d'état in the region for example.

Although the United States aims to provide aid and combat human rights violations by security forces in bilateral talks, it lacks a roadmap and a clear set of principles.

In this sense, many academics forecast growing pains, as the current US approach to engagement with African states is characterized by a history of paternalism and rejection on the international stage. Changing this situation appears complicated but necessary to establish a real partnership.

The analysis then focused on finding out whether US assistance policies in Africa have been strongly influenced by China and whether these policies represented responses in relation to geostrategic competition between the two states.

In this case, it emerged that the theme of competition between the US and China is increasingly recurring in international debates regarding Africa. This is also confirmed by discussions in the US Congress that emphasize the importance of evaluating foreign assistance in relation to Chinese activities on the continent. The U.S. government seems to be questioning whether U.S. policies are adequate to promote its interests over so-called competitors on the African continent. In addition, members of Congress seem to express some concern about the African perception of the United States and China, considering the broader Chinese support, especially in high-profile infrastructure in the region.

One of the issues that emerges particularly in the discussions of Congress is precisely the geostrategic rivalry for the supply of critical minerals, a need that has a major impact on the country's economy and security. The technologic competition has also taken on a certain importance in the analysis, underlying the risks for both countries on geopolitical scene.

Moreover, soft power and global leadership of the United States in Africa received a particular attention. A context of confrontation between the USA and China is highlighted, especially in Africa where both countries are trying to gain influence and to cultivate increasingly stable relations at the global level.

Finally, Geostrategic competition has also been projected at the military level. The desire to acquire greater geopolitical and strategic relevance has prevailed in the political dynamics between the US and China, which seem increasingly preoccupied with the initiatives carried out by each other.

It is precisely this consideration that leads many academics to think that the growing Chinese presence on the continent is now a significant factor within American policies aimed at Africa, even if this is not always stated as the main concern by US political leaders.

This excessive focus on China has also been noted by several experts, who have interpreted the launch of the Biden administration's \$55 billion support plan as the United States' desire to strengthen its political and economic influence in Africa, but at the same time the US government's intention to respond to a long and entrenched Chinese presence on the continent is not excluded.

These observations were even more supported by some U.S. policy choices in Africa. The cases of Equatorial Guinea and Congo have proved emblematic in this competitive perspective.

In fact, it has been noted that in these situations the United States has given up on maintaining the conditions of its policy of assistance, cooperating with autocratic countries with the intention of distancing these countries from Chinese domination or for security issues and strategies related to the Asian government.

In the case of Equatorial Guinea, the Biden administration has tried to regain control of relations with the African country, without considering the conditions of democracies and human rights expressed during the US-Africa summit. This was seen by analysts as an attempt to convince the country to stay away from China, and more specifically not to allow the construction and use of a Chinese-sponsored naval base on African territory.

The Congo case followed a similar dynamic, with the U.S. government establishing cooperative relations for economic and geostrategic reasons. An attempt to strengthen its economy and to confront China's dominance in critical resources in Congo, without considering labor standards and respect for workers' rights in the cobalt sector.

These results suggest that China's influence has had a very significant impact on U.S. policy in Africa. Even if the US government did not show the willingness to convey the idea of Africa as a competitive battleground, it has set many of the recent policies with the aim of counterbalancing China's growing position on the continent.

RIASSUNTO TESI

La seguente tesi di ricerca si concentra sugli aiuti allo sviluppo come strumento di politica estera ed economica di un paese donatore. L'oggetto della tesi riguarda proprio il ruolo politico ed economico dell'assistenza estera con particolare attenzione alle strategie recenti americane in Africa.

Proprio le potenzialità inesprese di questo continente e l'influenza esercitata dalla Cina ci spingono a comprendere al meglio quali possano essere le implicazioni per gli USA nel suo stesso rapporto con il continente africano.

La trasformazione nelle politiche di assistenza estera americane rispetto ai cambiamenti geopolitici e all'azione cinese in Africa, diventa quindi ragione di grande interesse nell'elaborato finale.

Sulla base di queste premesse, la tesi di ricerca si prefigge di analizzare in che modo l'arrivo della Cina ha cambiato le politiche americane e soprattutto, se le stesse politiche di assistenza americane si possano considerare risposte concrete al ruolo crescente della Cina in Africa. Comprendere se la competizione geostrategica e la rivalità con la Cina hanno avuto un reale impatto sulla strategia americana è sicuramente una questione importante nelle reazioni interazionali.

La tesi discute questa questione, seguendo un percorso di quattro capitoli che andranno ad approfondire i vari aspetti dell'assistenza estera americana in Africa e i fattori che la influenzano.

Nel primo capitolo, si riscontra una certa importanza degli aiuti come strumento impattante nella politica estera di un paese. L'assistenza allo sviluppo viene definita come una pratica con un valore significativo, in quanto implica un importante potenziale politico per i paesi donatori.

Grazie a questa pratica, è possibile influenzare gli affari interni ed esteri di altri stati riceventi.

A dimostrazione di ciò, molti analisti americani, per esempio, sostengono che i leader e i politici statunitensi considerano l'assistenza estera come uno "strumento essenziale della politica estera del loro paese", correlata agli interessi di sicurezza nazionale degli Stati Uniti.

Questa logica è stata un tema dominante nelle giustificazioni dell'assistenza allo sviluppo durante la Guerra Fredda, diventando un vero e proprio mezzo strategico nella contrapposizione tra USA e URSS.

Tuttavia, oltre al valore politico, è emersa anche la prospettiva politico-economica degli aiuti allo sviluppo. L'acceso dibattito sullo sviluppo economico si è diviso in due fazioni: da un lato, si è imposta la teoria della modernizzazione con l'idea che l'assistenza estera fosse essenziale per promuovere la crescita e lo sviluppo dei paesi africani, dall'altro si sono opposte altre teorie come quella della dipendenza che ritenevano tale aiuto potesse rafforzare maggiormente i paesi più sviluppati.

Negli Stati Uniti, il concetto della modernizzazione si è fortemente diffuso nel pensiero politico americano tra il 1950 e il 1960, evidenziando l'opportunità per il governo americano di garantire l'aiuto allo sviluppo come forma di soft power.

Utilizzare l'assistenza tecnica e i finanziamenti esteri come alternative all'intervento militare era diventata una possibilità concreta per raggiungere gli obiettivi di politica estera.

L'idea degli Stati Uniti come promotori e sostenitori delle trasformazioni modernizzatrici si è manifestata anche nel saggio di Henry Luce del 1941 "The American Century". Luce sosteneva che l'America avrebbe dovuto diffondere il suo potenziale tecnico ed economico in tutto il mondo, e questo era possibile quando gli Stati Uniti erano disposti a inviare aiuti e supporto tecnico come ingegneri, scienziati, medici, costruttori e educatori.

Dagli anni '70 in poi, il moderno paradigma di sviluppo americano è stato messo in discussione nella gestione delle politiche di assistenza estera. Il crollo del sistema economico di Bretton Woods e la contestazione dell'egemonia degli Stati Uniti hanno prodotto una perdita di fiducia verso i valori e i principi della modernizzazione.

Il primo capitolo si è concluso quindi con l'idea che da questa crisi della modernizzazione, sono emersi nuovi approcci e concetti. Nuovi modelli di sviluppo che hanno posto l'accento sui bisogni ambientali e sulla lotta alla povertà, e hanno dato origine al concetto di sviluppo sostenibile e inclusivo che ancora oggi rappresentano criteri fondamentali nelle politiche di assistenza statunitensi.

Nel secondo capitolo, si fa riferimento in modo specifico alle politiche di assistenza attuali sotto l'amministrazione Biden.

Il Summit USA-Africa si è rivelato in questo caso molto importante in quanto durante l'evento è stato annunciato piano di assistenza americano di 55 miliardi di dollari all'Africa.

Il Consigliere per la Sicurezza Nazionale, Jake Sullivan, ha dichiarato che il piano è stato promulgato con l'intenzione di manifestare la leadership, le idee e le innovazioni africane, rendendo più efficaci gli investimenti e le iniziative precedenti in Africa.

Contestualmente al piano da 55 miliardi, l'amministrazione Biden-Harris ha deciso per il lancio anche della "Strategia statunitense verso l'Africa subsahariana" con l'obiettivo di creare un partenariato tra Stati Uniti e Africa.

Ciò che è emerso dai documenti ufficiali, è il fatto che le politiche di assistenza sopra citate hanno manifestato quattro pilastri fondamentali: promuovere l'apertura e le società aperte, fornire dividendi democratici e di sicurezza, promuovere la ripresa dalla pandemia e le opportunità economiche, sostenere la conservazione, l'adattamento ai cambiamenti climatici e una transizione energetica giusta.

Ciò nonostante, nel complesso, il capitolo si chiude con delle considerazioni non del tutto favorevoli alla strategia attuale del presidente Biden.

Molti studiosi hanno definito la strategia americana come molto simile alle precedenti amministrazioni, specialmente in termini di negligenza nei confronti del continente africano. In una prospettiva di lungo periodo, questa politica è considerata insostenibile, in quanto la crescita demografica prevista in Africa e la presenza della Cina, pongono sempre più ostacoli all'assistenza estera statunitense.

Proprio l'influenza della Cina nel continente viene ripresa nel capitolo terzo. Nell'analisi descritta, la Cina, dopo la guerra civile cinese del 1947, risulta aver raggiunto una posizione dominante in Africa. Nel novembre 2003

con il primo vertice a Pechino del Forum per la cooperazione Cina-Africa (FOCAC) è stata rafforzata la cooperazione tra gli Stati africani e il governo asiatico.

Nel 2016, gli aiuti cinesi hanno raggiunto il picco più alto. Ci sono stati risultati notevoli in molti settori. Il commercio, per esempio, Cina-Africa si è affermato con una tendenza in forte crescita negli ultimi anni. Non a caso nel 2022, la Cina era il partner principale dell'Africa, con un flusso commerciale che totalizzava oltre 282 miliardi di dollari.

Anche gli investimenti diretti esteri cinesi in Africa non sono passati inosservati, passando da circa 75 milioni di dollari nel 2003 a 5 miliardi di dollari nel 2021.

L'impegno infrastrutturale stesso ha raggiunto una posizione dominante nel continente africano con il lancio nel 2013 del Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) che ha portato la Cina a essere il finanziatore principale di un progetto su cinque e costruttore principale di un progetto su tre.

Allo stesso tempo, accanto a questi investimenti, la Cina ha partecipato attivamente anche al finanziamento dal debito estero dell'Africa negli ultimi decenni, aprendo una discussione intensa sulla così detta "trappola del debito".

Sulla scia di questo grande coinvolgimento cinese, si è fatta avanti l'ipotesi secondo la quale la Cina utilizzi l'assistenza estera per promuovere i propri interessi commerciali e creare una zona economica esclusiva in Africa. I dati analizzati hanno identificato che i flussi di aiuti cinesi hanno provocato un aumento della dipendenza economica di molti paesi beneficiari.

Anche Min Ye (2022), nel modello studiato, ha trovato una conferma positiva dell'importanza degli interessi politici ed economici cinesi in Africa, mostrando, per esempio, una certa relazione tra gli interessi nelle risorse minerarie e l'assistenza estera cinese.

Complessivamente, i modelli che sono stati osservati sembrano essere in accordo con la narrativa "economico-strategica cinese".

Da un punto di vista geopolitico, negli ultimi anni la Cina ha ampliato in modo significativo la sua influenza politica, economica, e socioculturale in Africa, portando così a importanti sviluppi nelle relazioni internazionali. Questa situazione evidenzia ulteriormente il ruolo del continente africano nello scacchiere della politica internazionale e nella competizione tra gli stati.

Il capitolo finale, quindi, cerca di rispondere alla domanda di ricerca, mettendo in risalto la presenza cinese in corrispondenza di una rinnovata competizione Est-Ovest nel sistema africano.

Il tema della competizione tra USA e Cina si rivela preponderante in questa analisi in quanto è sempre più ricorrente nei dibattiti internazionali riguardanti l'Africa. Ciò è confermato anche dalle discussioni del Congresso degli Stati Uniti che sottolineano una certa importanza nel valutare l'assistenza estera in relazione alle attività cinesi nel continente.

Di base, si manifesta l'intenzione di capire se le politiche americane siano abbastanza adeguate a promuovere i propri interessi rispetto ai cosiddetti competitor presenti nel continente.

È proprio questa considerazione che porta molti accademici a pensare che la crescente presenza cinese nel continente sia ormai un fattore significativo all'interno delle politiche americane rivolte all'Africa, anche se non sempre questa è dichiarata come la principale preoccupazione dai leader politici statunitensi.

Un articolo del New York Times ha definito le politiche di assistenza americane come ricerca di aumentare l'impegno americano in Africa. Un coinvolgimento nel continente che è ormai sottovalutato da molto tempo. Questa eccessiva attenzione alla Cina è stata notata anche da diversi esperti, che hanno interpretato il lancio del piano di sostegno da 55 miliardi di dollari dell'amministrazione Biden come la volontà degli Stati Uniti di rafforzare la propria influenza politica ed economica in Africa, ma allo stesso tempo come esigenza del governo statunitense di rispondere a una lunga e radicata presenza cinese nel continente.

Secondo la letteratura analizzata, l'amministrazione Biden, quindi, dimostra la volontà di recuperare una posizione più favorevole, considerando che la Cina ha un vantaggio notevole negli investimenti esteri verso il continente e molti paesi africani si sono dimostrati di posizioni diverse anche rispetto alla guerra in Ucraina. Nel report del Congresso americano, si parla infatti di una risposta ai crescenti legami tra Cina e Africa, definendo una serie di mezzi di assistenza estera con l'obiettivo di salvaguardare gli interessi degli Stati Uniti nel continente.

Queste osservazioni sono state ancora più supportate da alcune scelte politiche degli Stati Uniti in Africa. I cosiddetti casi della Guinea Equatoriale e del Congo si rivelano emblematici in questa prospettiva competitiva. Infatti, è stato notato che in alcune situazioni, gli Stati Uniti hanno rinunciato a mantenere le condizioni della loro politica di assistenza, cooperando con paesi autocratici con l'intenzione di allontanare questi paesi dal dominio cinese o per questioni di sicurezza e strategie legate al governo asiatico.

Nel caso della Guinea Equatoriale, l'amministrazione Biden ha cercato di riprendere in mano i rapporti con il Paese africano, senza considerare le condizioni delle democrazie e dei diritti umani espresse durante il vertice USA-Africa. Questo è stato considerato dagli analisti come un tentativo di convincere il paese a stare lontano dalla Cina e più specificamente a non consentire la costruzione e l'uso di una base navale sponsorizzata dalla Cina sul territorio africano.

Il caso del Congo ha seguito una dinamica simile con il governo degli Stati Uniti che ha stabilito relazioni di cooperazione per ragioni economiche e geostrategiche. Un tentativo di rafforzare la propria economia e di affrontare il dominio della Cina nelle risorse critiche in Congo senza considerare gli standard di lavoro e il rispetto dei diritti dei lavoratori nel settore del cobalto.

In conclusione, i risultati di ricerca suggeriscono che l'influenza della Cina ha avuto un impatto molto significativo sulla politica statunitense in Africa che, pur non mostrando la volontà di considerare l'Africa come un campo di battaglia competitivo, ha perseguito l'obiettivo di controbilanciare il crescente dominio cinese nel continente.

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